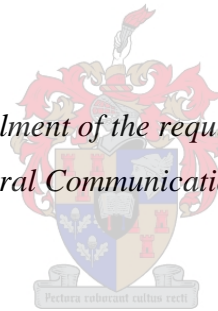


**The position of English in the language repertoires of
multilingual students at a tertiary institution:
A case study at the Vaal University of Technology**

Mariëtte Bam

*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Intercultural Communication at Stellenbosch University*



Supervisor: Dr Frenette Southwood
Co-supervisor: Dr Marcelyn Oostendorp
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Department of General Linguistics

December 2016

Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Mariëtte Bam

December 2016

Copyright © 2016 Stellenbosch University

All rights reserved

Abstract

This thesis describes a case study on the position of English in the language repertoires of students at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT). Despite its multilingual student body, English is officially the VUT's only language of learning and teaching (LoLT).

The aim of the study was to draw up a language profile of VUT students by making use of language background questionnaires and language portraits. Furthermore, the study investigated the language biographies of a selected group of students with similar language histories, in the sense that they lived in the same province (Limpopo), had the same schooling background and had similar exposure to the main languages of that province. Here, the aim was to provide a detailed description of the formative language experiences of these students as reported in their language biographies and to gain insight into how these experiences relate to their current knowledge and use of English. Individual interviews were conducted with the Limpopo students, and their English marks over a two-year period were considered.

All participants were enrolled for the compulsory second-year subject Applied Communication Skills. Data collected consisted of 127 completed language background questionnaires and language portraits, eight individual interviews, and the following marks of the interviewed participants: the mark for English on their National Senior Certificate, the mark for the compulsory computer-based VUT course English Development Learning, and the mark for Applied Communication Skills. An analysis was also done of the Limpopo students' English essays. A mixed methods approach was followed: some findings were presented as descriptive statistics, and thematic analysis was also done.

Findings included that 10% of the participants were bilingual and 90% multilingual. Participants on average spoke four languages, but some spoke up to 10. Most were not highly proficient in English, but participants still indicated that English was their language of choice outside of family-related domains: whereas they mostly used African languages in the home and at family and religious gatherings, they almost exclusively used English at university, on social media, and at social gatherings. That said, they voiced appreciation for their mother tongues and valued multilingualism. The findings for the Limpopo students concurred with those for the participants as a whole, with the analysis of their essays and English marks indicating limited English proficiency. Aliteracy (the phenomenon that adults who can read and write in a particular language choose not to do so) was noticed amongst the participants for the African languages they spoke as mother tongues. Based on the findings of this study (including those on aliteracy in African languages), English is at present deemed the most suitable LoLT for the VUT.

This study drew on established research in the fields of multilingualism in education; language policy and practice; language repertoires, biographies, and identities; and language as an instrument in learning. Based on the findings of this study, the recommendation is that students should be offered opportunities to develop industry-acceptable English skills in order to improve their chances of obtaining good employment and progressing well on their chosen career paths.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis beskryf 'n gevallestudie oor posisie van Engels in die taalrepertoires van studente aan die Vaal Universiteit van Tegnologie (VUT). Ten spyte van hierdie universiteit se veeltalige studentekorps is Engels die VUT se enigste taal van leer en onderrig (TLO).

Die doel van die studie was om 'n taalprofiel van VUT-studente op te stel deur gebruik te maak van taalagtergrondsvraelyste en taalportrette. Die studie het ook die taalbiografieë van 'n geselekteerde groep studente ondersoek met 'n ooreenstemmende taalgeskiedenis, deurdat hul in dieselfde provinsie (Limpopo) grootgeword en steeds gewoon het, dieselfde skoolagtergrond gehad het en soortgelyke blootstelling gehad het aan die vernaamste tale van daardie provinsie. Die doel hiervan was om 'n gedetailleerde beskrywing te gee van die formatiewe taal-ervarings van hierdie studente soos weergegee in hul taalbiografieë en om insig te verkry oor hoe hierdie ervarings verband hou met hul huidige kennis en gebruik van Engels. Individuele onderhoude is gevoer met die Limpopo-studente en hul Engelspunte is oor 'n tydperk van twee jaar is in ag geneem.

Alle deelnemers was ingeskryf vir die verpligte tweedejaarsvak *Applied Communication Skills*. Die data wat ingesamel is, het bestaan uit 127 ingevulde taalagtergrond-vraelyste en taalportrette, agt individuele onderhoude en die volgende punte van die onderhouddeelnemers: Engelspunte soos dit verskyn op die Nasionale Senior Sertifikaat, punte vir die verpligte rekenaargebaseerde VUT-kursus *English Development Learning*, asook punte vir *Applied Communication Skills*. Onderhouddeelnemers se Engelse opstelle is ook ontleed. 'n Gemengde metodes-benadering is gevolg: sommige bevindinge is aangebied as beskrywende statistiek, en daar is ook van tematiese ontleding gebruik gemaak.

Daar is ondermeer bevind dat 10% van die deelnemers tweetalig was en 90% veeltalig. Gemiddeld was deelnemers vier tale magtig, maar sommige deelnemers kon tot 10 tale praat. Die meeste deelnemers was nie goed vaardig in Engels nie, maar het steeds Engels aangedui as hul taal van keuse buite familie-verwante domeine: waar meestal Afrikatale gebruik is in die huis en tydens familie- en godsdienstige byeenkomste, het deelnemers byna uitsluitlik Engels gebruik by die universiteit, op sosiale media en tydens sosiale byeenkomste. Deelnemers het egter hul waardering uitgespreek vir hul moedertale en het veeltaligheid as belangrik geag. Die bevindinge vir die Limpopo-studente het ooreengestem met dié vir die deelnemers as geheel, met die ontleding van hul opstelle en Engelspunte wat beperkte Engelse vaardigheid aangetoon het. "Ageletterdheid" (die verskynsel dat volwassenes wat mense 'n bepaalde taal kan lees en skryf, verkies om nie so te doen nie) is opgemerk onder die deelnemers vir die Afrikatale wat hulle as moedertale praat. Volgens die bevindinge van die studie (insluitende dié van "ageletterdheid" in Afrikatale), word Engels tans beskou as die mees geskikte TLO vir die VUT.

Hierdie studie het gesteun op gevestigde navorsing in die velde veeltaligheid in opvoedkunde; taalbeleid en -praktyk; taalrepertoires, -biografieë, en -identiteite; en taal as instrument van leer. Die aanbeveling na aanleiding van die bevindinge van hierdie studie is dat studente die geleentheid gegun word om industrie-aanvaarbare Engelse vaardighede te ontwikkel ten einde hul kanse te verbeter op goeie werksgeleenthede en goeie vordering in hul gekose loopbane.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my amazing and well-organised supervisor, Dr Frenette Southwood. It is not easy communicating over email in distance learning, but she always managed to communicate with me in due time and with welcomed direction. Her help extended far more than just guidance; she also made this a pleasurable and satisfying journey. I could not have succeeded without her leadership and care. She was the blessing and favour that I prayed for.

I would like to thank Dr Marcelyn Oostendorp for helping me with a bursary and for her valuable input and information sharing. I also thank Prof. Christine Anthonissen who originally helped me with my topic and proposal development. Both ladies were invaluable to my study.

A special thanks to my HOD, Mrs Cariana Fouché, who wiped away the tears and calmly listened to my outbursts of frustration. She always gave me a kind answer and good advice. Thank you for your support and help with balancing work and studies.

A special and heartfelt thank you to my support system:

My pillar: Arno, my wonderful, loving and extremely patient husband; my gift from above whom I love dearly. Thank you for helping with cooking and cleaning and for comforting me continually without any complaint.

My wonderful family: Mother Magda, father Theo, brother Quintin and mother-in-law Tienie. Thank you for your encouragement, support and love. Thank you for believing in me!

Friends who shared the joy, tears and frustration but always had an encouraging word: Esme, Jackie, Jennie, Jeanine, Marita, Nadia, Sam, Santjie, Susan, Teboho and Quintin.

Last but above all: My Creator, Almighty Father YHWH who has blessed me from the beginning of this project to the end. His word is true. He has said: Deuteronomy 31:6 – “Be strong and courageous. Don’t tremble! Don’t be afraid of them! YHWH your Elohim is the one who is going with you. He won’t abandon you or leave you.” Although this was not a physical battle, it was surely one of the hardest emotional battles, and Romans 11:36 rings true: Everything is from Him and by Him and for Him. Glory belongs to Him forever! Amein!

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Chapter 1: Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.1 General background to the study | 1 |
| 1.2 The context of the current study: The Vaal University of Technology..... | 3 |
| 1.2.1 The climate in which the study was conducted | 3 |
| 1.2.2 Demographic environment | 4 |
| 1.2.3 The potential participant pool..... | 5 |
| 1.3 Research questions | 7 |
| 1.4 Key terminology..... | 7 |
| Chapter 2: Multilingualism in tertiary education | 10 |
| 2.1 Outline of the chapter | 10 |
| 2.2 Multilingualism – a widespread phenomenon | 10 |
| 2.3 English as a lingua franca | 11 |
| 2.4 The 2003 Language Policy of South Africa | 13 |
| 2.5 The current position of English in South Africa..... | 13 |
| 2.6 Language policies, their implementation in the South African tertiary education sector, and the implementation of language policies..... | 16 |
| 2.7 Challenges regarding the use of English in higher education in South Africa | 22 |
| 2.7.1 Proficiency in English and in the mother tongue..... | 22 |
| 2.7.2 General aliteracy in South Africa | 23 |
| 2.7.3 The perceived status of the relevant languages | 24 |
| 2.7.4 Multilingualism in the staff and student body | 25 |
| 2.7.5 Code switching | 26 |
| 2.8 Chapter conclusion..... | 27 |
| Chapter 3: Methodology | 29 |
| 3.1 The research participants | 29 |
| 3.2 The Limpopo school system..... | 31 |
| 3.3 Data collection methods and instruments | 33 |
| 3.3.1 Language questionnaire | 33 |
| 3.3.2 Language portraits | 34 |
| 3.3.3 Individual interviews | 34 |
| 3.3.4 School and university marks..... | 35 |
| 3.3.5 Essay writing..... | 35 |
| 3.4 Ethical considerations | 36 |
| Chapter 4: Language profile of all participants | 37 |
| 4.1 The manner in which the questionnaire data is reported | 37 |
| 4.2 The linguistic profile of the 2015/2016 Applied Communication Skills students at the VUT | 38 |
| 4.3 English proficiency and patterns of language use of 2015/2016 Applied Communication Skills students at the VUT..... | 43 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| 4.4 Language portraits of 2015/2016 Applied Communication Skills students at the VUT | 48 |
| 4.5 Summary of all participants' language profiles..... | 52 |
| Chapter 5: Language profile of Limpopo participants | 54 |
| 5.1 Purpose of this chapter | 54 |
| 5.2 Some demographics of the Limpopo participants | 54 |
| 5.3 Languages of the Limpopo participants | 55 |
| 5.4 Language proficiency and patterns of language use of Limpopo participants | 66 |
| 5.5 Summary of the Limpopo participants' linguistic profile | 72 |
| Chapter 6: English skills of the Limpopo students..... | 74 |
| 6.1 English skills considered | 74 |
| 6.2 The National Senior Certificate symbols obtained for languages | 74 |
| 6.3 Marks obtained for the English Development and Learning course | 75 |
| 6.3.1 Background information on the English Development and Learning course | 75 |
| 6.3.2 EDL data of the interviewed Limpopo participants..... | 76 |
| 6.4 Marks obtained for Applied Communication Skills 2..... | 77 |
| 6.5 Marks comparison between matriculation year and second-year ACS | 78 |
| 6.6 Evaluation of the English essays written by the interviewed Limpopo participants..... | 78 |
| 6.7 Summary of the recorded English language skills of the interviewed Limpopo participants | 83 |
| Chapter 7: Language-related themes emerging from the interviews with the Limpopo participants | 85 |
| 7.1 The interviews conducted with the Limpopo students..... | 85 |
| 7.2 The importance of knowing your home language..... | 85 |
| 7.3 The usefulness of English | 87 |
| 7.4 The enjoyment of English | 88 |
| 7.5 Unsuccessful strategies or difficulties in the teaching and learning of English at school..... | 88 |
| 7.6 Code switching as pedagogical strategy regardless of the official LoLT being English..... | 90 |
| 7.7 Out-of-school activities that assisted participants in learning and/or improving their English... | 91 |
| 7.8 Summary of the interview data collected | 92 |
| Chapter 8: Conclusion | 94 |
| 8.1 Answers to the research questions | 94 |
| 8.2 Remarks on using an African language as LoLT at university level: The problem of aliteracy.. | 96 |
| 8.3 English as LoLT: Study findings..... | 97 |
| 8.4 Strengths and limitations of the study, and directions for further research | 98 |
| 8.5 Concluding remarks..... | 99 |
| References | 100 |
| Appendix A: Consent form..... | 108 |
| Appendix B: Language background questionnaire..... | 111 |
| Appendix C: Language portraits | 115 |
| Appendix D: Interview schedule | 117 |

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 General background to the study

This study investigated the language repertoires and language biographies of a sample of second-year students registered for diploma courses in various fields of study at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) in Gauteng, South Africa. As a VUT lecturer in Communication Studies, I was interested in the multilingual repertoires, which are currently very limitedly acknowledged and used in the teaching of students. The influence of multilingual repertoires on the learning practices of students themselves is also under-researched. The aim of the study was to draw up a linguistic profile of the students, mapping the full range of their language resources regardless of whether or not all their languages feature in the academic learning context. Further, the study qualitatively investigated the language biographies of a selected group of students with similar language histories, in the sense that they lived in the same geographical region, had the same schooling background and had similar exposure to the main languages of that region. Therefore, these students might have had comparable patterns of language input before commencing with tertiary education. Here, the aim was to provide a detailed description of the formative language experiences of the students as reported in their language biographies and to gain insight into how these relate to their current knowledge and use of English as a language of learning and teaching (LoLT).

One of the interests of studies on language repertoires and language biographies of students is how students' mother tongues¹ feature, if at all, in the process of teaching and learning. A central question when the LoLT is the national lingua franca – in the case of South Africa, English – relates to the reality and admissibility of using a student's mother tongue in the educational environment. Where English lingua franca is the LoLT, there are a range of questions related to the role that languages other than English in students' repertoires play in the development of new knowledge. Another point of interest when investigating language repertoires and biographies in multilingual tertiary education contexts is how students relate to their mother tongues in a context in which English is the LoLT, and the extent to which their preferences and reflections on the possibility of using their mother tongues as LoLTs are deemed important.

¹ I am aware of the debate surrounding the use of the terms “first language”, “home language”, and “mother tongue”. In the literature review, I attempt to use the term that expresses the sense intended by the original author, and where I report on my own work, I use the term “mother tongue”, as this is the term used most in studies on medium of instruction or LoLT.

The study drew on existing, established research in the fields of multilingualism in education, language policy and practice, political influences, language repertoire, language biography, language identity and language as an instrument in learning. Of course in a study of limited scope such as the current study, it is not possible to pay equal attention to all of these fields. Those most relevant to this study will be introduced in the literature overview presented in Chapter 2 of the thesis.

Multilingualism is a global phenomenon, and in many spheres being multilingual is viewed as a considerable advantage, even an indication of intelligence. Multilingualism might hold numerous cognitive benefits, including protection against dementia, enhanced executive control functioning, and enhanced creativity (Bialystok 2009). This statement can lead one to argue that learning more than one language is beneficial to a person's future and can even be a key element to future success. Despite the apparent recognition of the benefits of multilingualism, English is in many contexts the language that is by default considered to be of utmost importance to acquire, not just for future success but also for general survival in a global village of mass media, entertainment and social networking (Mastin 2011). In many global contexts in which there is hegemony of English, there might be ignorance about the value of multilingualism for a society – in fact, multilingualism might be viewed as generating communication problems within a society. In this regard, Töttemeyer (2009:1) states that multilingualism has been a major challenge in developing literacy and a reading culture in Africa, and that people in Europe may find it difficult to fully understand the extent of challenges that multilingualism brings. Töttemeyer (2009:3) notes that some of the benefits of using a LoLT that is the mother tongue of the learner include that there are fewer school drop-outs, more academic and socio-economic success, and a greater chance of learning a second language (L2) successfully. Töttemeyer (2009:4) furthermore explains that, because of poverty and ignorance, many parents in African countries view a colonial language as the means of development and want their children to become fluent in this language because they hope that the children will be more successful than they were and will thus secure good jobs. Despite the benefits of multilingualism, parents of many African learners value their children's fluency in a colonial language more than they value well-developed literacy skills in the mother tongue (Töttemeyer 2009:4).

In the current study, I work on the assumption that multilingual university students with a South African language other than English as their mother tongue use their mother tongues to a greater or lesser extent in their own learning and in their development of new knowledge. This study investigated the phenomenon of multilingual repertoires of students being limitedly recognised in institutional language policy and also in practices that often occur in the learning and teaching process where the LoLT is English. The uses of the students' mother tongues can go unrecognised, which is

potentially problematic as it can impede or even deny the explicit introduction of multilingual practices that could facilitate learning.

A number of difficulties that students experience in developing new knowledge can be related to less than optimally developed academic and communicative skills in the official LoLT. This study considered the educational context in which multilingual South African students at a tertiary educational institution study, with a view to ascertain how the language-in-education policy of this institution is reflected (or not) in the learning practices and academic language uses of a selected group of students. The LoLT practices prevalently framed this study, even if they were not fully investigated. I attempted to interpret various kinds of information (such as students' language repertoires and their English marks) to present a profile which could inform further reflection on the use of students' multilingual repertoires in tertiary education.

1.2 The context of the current study: The Vaal University of Technology

1.2.1 The climate in which the study was conducted

At the VUT, it is standard practice for the agendas of the Student Representative Council, other political agendas, and possible strikes to be taken into consideration when planning annual work schedules. Over the past few years, many violent protests disrupted classes at the VUT for various reasons, some reported on by the national news networks. Two examples are Sibanyoni (2014) reporting for Eyewitness News in September 2014 that the VUT temporarily closed down after violent protests over financial aid and planned graduations, and Sello (2015) reporting in September 2015 that classes were suspended following student protests over security after two students were shot and killed at their off-campus residence. It is therefore clear that there are a number of political factors that can influence the day-to-day business of the VUT. The Student Representative Council plays a big role in voicing students' dissatisfaction, and politically motivated demonstrations have become part of the culture of the VUT and are, to a certain extent, considered during the finalising of academic calendars.

The data collection for the current study took place during 2015 and 2016, a particularly tumultuous time in higher education in South Africa and many other parts of the world: In 2015 and 2016, some of the biggest, most expensive education-related strikes – based on damages caused – occurred. The #FeesMustFall campaign took South Africa by storm in 2015 (starting on the 23rd of October 2015) and, coupled with protests against the outsourcing of labour by universities, continued into 2016, severely affecting almost all tertiary institutions at one time or another. Baloyi and Isaacs (2015), in a

special CNN report, explain that the “unprecedented movement of student activism has been sweeping South African university campuses and cities” from October 2015 onwards. Not since the Soweto Uprising of 1976, which centred on the issue of LoLTs in schools, have this many young people arisen to demand the right to quality and accessible education. The result was that the students were granted their demand of a 0% increase in the tuition fees (Baloyi and Isaacs 2015). Baloyi and Isaacs (2015), comparing the demonstrations to the Soweto Uprising of 1976, state that the fact that demonstrations continued after the abovementioned demand was granted indicates that the students’ displeasure runs deeper than that due to tuition fees. The youth demand the right to quality and accessible education, calling for “the “decolonisation” and “transformation” of higher education institutions, the insourcing of outsourced workers (mostly cleaning, security and support staff, often the most vulnerable workers), and the release of their classmates arrested earlier [during the protests]” (Baloyi and Isaacs 2015).

The 2016 academic year started much like the 2015 academic year ended, with demonstrations at some tertiary institutions starting as early as January, but it was not until May 2016 that these demonstrations commenced at the VUT. Eyewitness News reported that after many days of protests, violent clashes erupted at the VUT in May 2016 (Ngcobo 2016). Teaching was suspended and students were ordered to leave their residences for security reasons (Ngcobo 2016), after an administrative office building and other buildings were set alight on the night of the 11th of May 2016. By this time, the data collection for the current study had been completed, but the data was still collected during a time of general student dissatisfaction, which might have influenced the data in unpredictable ways.

1.2.2 Demographic environment

As stated above, this study investigated the language repertoires and language biographies of a sample of second-year students registered for diploma courses in various fields at the VUT. In this section, I will provide some background on the VUT and the student demographics of this institution.

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) Quality Committee’s Audit Report Number 11 (2007:6) states that the VUT has evolved from an Afrikaans-medium technical college with 189 white students in 1966 to an English-medium university of technology with close to 17 000 predominantly African students in 2005 (see below for more recent enrolment figures). According to the VUT website (2013), the institution was established in 2004. The website also states that it originated as a College of Advanced Technical Education in 1966, and in 1979 became known as the Vaal Triangle Technicon (1979-2003). In 2004, the number of South African institutions of higher education and training was reduced from 36 to 23 by means of mergers and incorporations, as part of the transformation and institutional

restructuring of the higher education sector, and the VUT was subsequently established. The CHE Quality Committee (2007:6) reports that the VUT, with its main campus situated in Vanderbijlpark (in Gauteng), was not greatly affected by the restructuring of the higher education sector as the institution was merely required to incorporate the nearby Sebokeng campus of the former Vista University. According to the VUT website (2013), the VUT has three satellite campuses: in Secunda (Mpumalanga), Kempton Park (Gauteng), and Upington (Northern Cape). CHE (2007:7) also reports that about a third of VUT students are distributed across the satellite campuses, and that these campuses are not residential. The main Vanderbijlpark campus, where the current study was conducted, is situated on 4.6 hectares of land with a library, lecture halls, laboratories, auditoriums and offices. There is an extension to the campus located in Educity, Sebokeng, which is being developed into a Science and Technology Park. The VUT is located in a highly industrialised area alongside major petro-chemical, steel, engineering, telecommunications and manufacturing companies. Mostly communities with poor economic backgrounds live in the surrounding areas (VUT website 2013).

The VUT is one of the largest universities of technology in South Africa. From 1996 to 2004, the VUT saw a 135% increase in the enrolment of African students – from 6 548 in 1996 to 15 371 in 2004, with 1 200 international students enrolled at diploma level, the majority from the African continent (CHE 2007:7-8). In this regard, the VUT website (2013) states that VUT students are drawn from all regions of the country as well as from 25 other countries. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2011:4) posted the student enrolment of the VUT as 21 861 contact students of whom 97% were Black and 46% were female.

The VUT has four faculties on its four campuses. These faculties are Applied and Computer Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Human Sciences, and Management Sciences. CHE (2007:7) notes that in these four faculties, the VUT offers approximately 130 programmes that range from diploma to doctoral studies, although the VUT is predominantly an undergraduate institution. In 2007, 99% of its enrolments were at undergraduate level (CHE 2007:7). SAQA (2011:11) reported the 2011 graduation rates as 17% for undergraduate degrees and diplomas, 19% for Masters Degrees and 9% for doctorates.

1.2.3 The potential participant pool

The participants were drawn from those registered for the second year of the subject Applied Communication Skills (ACS2). Typically, there are multilingual students from across the country, as well as students from other regions in Africa, enrolled for this subject. The schooling background of students in this module usually varies in different ways. Amongst others, they would typically have

had different LoLTs at school: some schools might have used only one language as the LoLT whereas others might have used more than one in an attempt to accommodate learners who are speakers of languages other than the official LoLT. Very few of these multilingual students report speaking English as their mother tongue or L2. Although the majority of these students officially had English as their LoLT and wrote the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations in English, the classroom practices would not always have reflected the schools' official language policy. Also, a smaller number of students had languages other than English, such as Afrikaans or French, as their LoLT; such students have had to transfer to English as LoLT in their tertiary education.

A subgroup of participants in the current study was from the Limpopo Province specifically. South Africa Info (2015) provides the following background on this province: The province, named after the Limpopo River, borders the countries of Botswana to the west, Zimbabwe to the north and Mozambique to the east. These shared borders make Limpopo favourably situated for economic cooperation with these three Southern African countries. Its capital, Polokwane, is the fifth-largest provincial capital in South Africa, with a population of 5.4 million people. The main languages spoken in the province are Sepedi (spoken by 52.9% of the population), Xitsonga (17%) and Tshivenda (16.7%).

The reasons that I chose to involve a subgroup of students from Limpopo specifically are as follows:

- (1) The primary and secondary education of the subgroup would have been administered by a single, provincial Department of Education.
- (2) Based on the abovementioned percentages of mother-tongue speakers in the Limpopo Province, it can be anticipated that there will be participants with a limited yet interesting variety of mother tongues partaking in the study.
- (3) Typically, there is a relatively large number of students from Limpopo at the VUT. Registered students from other regions, such as Gauteng, are likely to be diverse in terms of mother tongues to such an extent that the number of languages (and the variables associated with these) will limit the interpretability of results.
- (4) Code mixing is common in Gauteng and may influence the in-depth questions on language repertoires in a negative way so that the aims of the study cannot be fulfilled. In this regard, Bembe (2006:3) explains that Gauteng is a linguistic and cultural "melting pot", because all 11 official South African languages are spoken in the province, and this results in contact phenomena such as frequent code switching, code mixing and lexical borrowing. Bembe (2006:72) says that the youth especially use slang that "mixes" the languages in diverse and multilingual environments such as Gauteng. Limpopo appears less diverse and therefore

participants from Limpopo were deemed more suitable to take part in the current study, given the specific research questions (see below).

1.3 Research questions

My interest in what the multilingual repertoires of VUT students look like and how they are used in the teaching of and learning among students at second-year level has led to the following research questions:

- (1) What is the language profile of the 2015 and 2016 second-year Applied Communication Skills students at the VUT?
- (2) What is the language profile of the 2015 and 2016 second-year Applied Communication Skills VUT students from the Limpopo region?
- (3) What kinds of information do the language biographies of Limpopo students give regarding their LoLTs?
- (4) How does the language biographic information of Limpopo students relate to current uses of English as lingua franca as LoLT?

1.4 Key terminology

Multilingualism:

According to Wei (2013), multilingualism is the coexistence, interaction and contact of different languages and may be at societal or individual level. Olivier (2009) explains, on the topic of multilingualism in South Africa, that the term “multilingualism” can be used to refer to the use or upkeep of more than one language in certain contexts in which many languages are spoken.

Language repertoire:

Blommaert and Backus (2013:11) consider the term “repertoire” as belonging to the core vocabulary of sociolinguistics. The authors explain that repertoire is defined as the “totality of linguistic resources including both invariant forms and variables” (Blommaert and Backus 2013:11) that are available to members of a particular community.

Language biography:

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) (2011) explains that a language biography provides a chronological overview of a person’s language learning experience with information about schools attended and courses completed and the use of languages in various situations. ELP (2011) states that

a language biography can help one become more aware of experiences, and allows one to draw conclusions from them for future learning. Language learning experiences, according to ELP (2011), should include aspects such as the languages with which one grew up; the language areas in which one lives or has lived; languages learnt; practical language use at work, during training, with acquaintances, on trips, etc.; and the language learning progress.

Language portrait:

In this study, I used the language portraits developed by Busch (2012). Participants received a body silhouette with the instruction to draw all their languages on it, making use of a different colour for each of the languages. An opportunity is typically given for the participants to talk about the geographical region they came from and/or to compare the languages painted on their language portrait.² Busch (2012:511) states that the exercise gives rise to the expression of emotions and feelings that are tied to a language and language use.

Language of teaching and learning (LoLT):

The LoLT is the language used to convey subject matter, i.e., the medium of instruction in a particular educational institution or classroom, and the language in which learners are expected to complete their academic work. English is the official LoLT at the VUT.

Lingua franca:

According to Gascoigne (2001), a lingua franca is “a common second language, shared by people who are unable to communicate in their native tongues. Such languages, essential in the history of communication, are usually a by-product of empire.” Gascoigne (2001) says that during the 20th century, English became a common lingua franca internationally because of the global spread of the British Empire as well as the commercial dominance of the United States of America (USA). English is the non-official lingua franca of South Africa and the VUT.

Academic Language:

Kinsella (2010:3) defines an academic language as the “language used in the classroom and workplace, the language of text, the language of assessments, the language of academic success and the language of power”. Kinsella (2010:2) notes that an academic language should contain specialised

² I planned on discussing each of the Limpopo students’ language portrait with him/her but, because of the low interview uptake rate (to be discussed later), this was not possible. In the current study, the language portraits were thus used to supplement the other data on multilingualism amongst the participants, rather than to ascertain the reasons why participants used particular colours for and particular placements of their languages in their language portraits.

vocabulary, grammar, and discourse/textual and functional skills that are associated with academic instruction as well as the mastery of academic materials and tasks.

Aliteracy:

Tötemeyer (2009:5) explains that aliteracy occurs when people who can read choose not to do so. Such persons may, for instance, read instructions on a packet for practical purposes but will not read for pleasure.

Chapter 2: Multilingualism in tertiary education

2.1 Outline of the chapter

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the published literature that is relevant to the overall aim of this study, which was to determine the position that English has in the language repertoire of multilingual students at the VUT. I start by providing some background on the phenomenon of multilingualism. Thereafter, I briefly discuss English as a lingua franca, basing the discussion on a study done in China. I then discuss South Africa's language policy pre- and post-1994 in order to contextualise the struggles that are currently being faced in the education sector, after which I consider the current position of English in multilingual South Africa, with the focus on the higher education sector. Looking at the use of English in the education sector, I will explore some of the challenges with which South Africa is faced, considering topics such as aliteracy and code-switching.

2.2 Multilingualism – a widespread phenomenon

Despite the hegemony of English,³ multilingualism is a widespread phenomenon in modern societies (Kang 2013:55); for historical, social or economic reasons, many people speak more than two languages (Kang 2013:55). Cook (2009:67) states that multilingualism should be viewed as the norm rather than the exception because most people are users of an L2 to a greater or lesser extent.⁴ Töttemeyer (2009:2) explains that, in many African countries, there are a number of spoken and written languages – for instance, 400 spoken languages in Nigeria, 120 spoken languages in Tanzania, more than 20 written languages in Ghana, 14 written languages in Namibia and more than 11 languages in South Africa. According to Töttemeyer (2009:2), it is “easier” in these contexts to stick to the colonial languages (often English, French or Portuguese), but large parts of the population never master these languages. Those who do not become proficient in the colonial languages are then marginalised in the education process if the colonial language is the LoLT, and often do not become functionally literate (Töttemeyer 2009:2). One colonial language, English, has had a far-reaching influence on globalisation, as discussed by Sharifian (2013). According to Sharifian (2013), English repeatedly brings together people from different backgrounds and cultures. For instance, people travelling from non-English speaking countries to other non-English speaking countries mostly use

³ Leppänen and Pahta (2012:150) compare English to a natural force and state that English has power over other languages and cultures springing from the technological and economic supremacy of the Anglo-American world.

⁴ Kang (2013:55) notes that researchers generally now agree that the proficiency of a multilingual speaker should be judged in its own right and should not be compared to that of a monolingual. Therefore, Kang (2013:55) states that current definitions of multilingualism “do not entail a native level of proficiency in each language”.

English as an international language, and this has led to the development of new varieties of English (see below). Sharifian (2013) refers to this process as the “globalisation” of English.

Silva (1997:6) provides a brief account of the recent history of multilingualism in South Africa. The political change brought about in 1994 was rapid as regards the balance between English and Afrikaans in government and the media, with an increase in the use of African languages on television specifically. English has remained the politically “neutral” language for public use during political speeches, national conferences and in Parliament. Although all official languages may be used in tertiary education, English is still dominant in this sector (Figone 2012:42). This means that multilingualism is rooted in the constitution and is thus being supported by the *de jure* language policy of the country. (The language policy of South Africa is discussed below.) However, the costs and other logistic considerations involved in translating, interpreting, and printing places *de facto* multilingualism beyond the reach of the South African economy, especially given pressing needs in other sectors such as health, housing, and education (Silva 1997:6).

Even with all the other pressing matters, there is still the success story of North-West University (NWU) regarding multilingualism. According to the NWU website (2015), they have been the leading contributor to multilingualism and nation building than any other university in South Africa, winning the category for interpreting and translation in higher education institutions in 2010, with the University of Cape Town being the runner-up. The NWU website (2015) stated that they achieved this possibly because of the belief in empowering people through using their preferred language and exceeding the statutory requirements set forth in language policies and practices as well as by using classroom interpreting services. Therefore, despite difficulty in implementing language policies and the many excuses not to attain results, it is not an unachievable task.

2.3 English as a lingua franca

English as a lingua franca is typically used between speakers who do not share a mother tongue or culture. According to Spolsky (2004:90), had English spread as a result of language policies in English-speaking countries, that would have been an example of successful language management, but there are no claims of that being the case. A more likely possibility is that English spread across the globe because of changes in “economic, technological, political, social, [and] religious” sectors (Spolsky 2004:90). English plays a major role in these sectors, but because the majority of English users are not native speakers of the language and therefore the vast majority of verbal exchanges in

English are not between native speakers (Seidlhofer 2005:339), English is spoken and written differently in different places.

One could ask if it is acceptable to have different varieties of English. In this regard, consider the case of “China English” versus American and British English (as compared by Qiong 2004): China joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001, and since then there has been strong motivation in China to learn English. The question was raised as to whether there is a need for English in China to conform to so-called “standard” varieties of English. The argument was that such conformation was both undesirable and virtually unattainable (especially because of pronunciation difficulties in English for Chinese learners), and therefore the decision was taken that Chinese learners should be learning so-called “China English”. Qiong (2004:26) discovered that the vast majority of the Chinese participants in the study had never heard of either “World English” or “China English”. In fact, the participants believed that the goal of all English language learning was to attain native speaker proficiency in standard American or British English. Qiong (2004:26) explains that the varieties of English are increasing; while British English and American English were traditionally regarded as the only two varieties of “standard” English, they are now regarded as only two of the many World Englishes. Qiong (2004:27) says that one of the major varieties that draw a lot of attention from linguists, researchers and educators is “China English”. The proposals that were made based on this finding by Qiong (2004:26) included a reorientation of English language learning in China and a thorough revision of the materials used there for both practical and cultural reasons (Qiong 2004).

Seidlhofer (2005:340) explains that the implications of the existence of different varieties of English for the teaching and learning of English are immense. Focusing on teaching general language awareness and communication strategies may prove more important than teaching the fine nuances of English first language (L1) speakers’ English, because such nuances become redundant and even counter-productive in lingua franca settings. The reason for this is that the absence of many of these nuances (like the use of the third-person singular present tense marker *-s*) does not cause any misunderstanding (Seidlhofer 2005:340).

In summary, English, although widespread across the world, will not be the same in terms of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary in all places. Local accents and local languages may have a significant effect on the comprehension and production of English in a lingua franca context and then obviously on education, both in terms of what learners/students are taught in their English language courses and how English is employed as LoLT.

2.4 The 2003 Language Policy of South Africa

According to the Department of Arts and Culture (2003:5), there are approximately 25 different languages spoken in South Africa, and the 11 that were granted official status were selected because their usage included about 98% of the total population. These 11 languages are (in alphabetical order): Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi (or Northern Sotho), Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga. South Africa is thus officially a multilingual country, and one of the characteristics of South African multilingualism is that many indigenous languages are shared by speech communities from different provinces (Department of Arts and Culture 2003:5-6). Linguistic and cultural diversity led to the introduction of the National Language Policy Framework in 2003 to initiate a new approach to multilingualism and to encourage the use of indigenous languages in order to foster and promote national unity. This policy was designed to take into account the broad acceptance of linguistic diversity, social justice, and equal access to public services and programmes, as well as respect for language (Department of Arts and Culture 2003:5-6). Despite the language policy not offering a prestigious position to English, this language has become the dominant lingua franca in various sectors in South Africa and the language of international interaction. In this regard, the Department of Arts and Culture (2003:14) states that the “government communication at the international level will normally be in English or ad hoc in the preferred language of the country concerned”. The position of English in South Africa is discussed further in the next section.

2.5 The current position of English in South Africa

As stated above, South Africa is officially multilingual but not all sectors of society are equally multilingual, and in many sectors English dominates. According to Onraët (2011:1), English has developed as the lingua franca in South Africa and is the primary LoLT because it is viewed as a language that can contribute to improved life chances. English has been an official language in South Africa since 1814 because of the political power shift from Dutch to British occupation (Olivier 2009).

According to Olivier (2009), English is important because of its international domination in science and the media, and although there are many attempts to promote multilingualism in South Africa, English is still the language most often used – also by politicians and government officials. This widespread acceptance of English as common medium of communication was not easily attained as English was not received in a uniformly positive way by everyone. In this regard, Silva (1997:1) states that, historically, English has evoked different reactions in different South African language communities. For instance, in the 1820s, English was imposed at the Cape on an unwilling Afrikaner

community who called it “the language of the enemy”. By contrast, it was accepted as the LoLT in mission schools which were perceived to offer their learners “superior English, classical and mathematical education” (Silva 1997:1). Silva (1997:1) noted that English was introduced to Black South African communities in the early 19th century, and by the end of that century there were many influential groups of Black educators, writers, ministers, and political leaders who were fluent in English. Silva (1997:1) explains that while English was viewed as the language of aspiration and empowerment for Black South Africans and for many Afrikaners at that time, Afrikaans became the openly-favoured language from 1948 onwards, when the National Party came into power. Silva (1997:2) states that, whilst L1 speakers of English are certainly outnumbered by non-L1 speakers of English in South Africa, there is a more influential body of mother-tongue speakers of English in South Africa than in, for instance, India, Nigeria or Kenya. According to Silva (1997:2), this means that there is a greater “standard mother-tongue English” presence in South Africa than in some other countries which chose English as the common language of communication. Silva (1997:7) states that one of the issues surrounding English in South Africa is the standard because an increased use of English in the electronic media and by non-mother-tongue speakers (such as by the Black elite in South Africa) has led to an intolerant reaction from some conservative L1 speakers of English.

According to Chetty (2012), English will continue to be a major language in South Africa as well as the rest of the world. Chetty (2012) states that essentials for the foregrounding of English as LoLT should be scrutinised so that each South African child is provided with an opportunity to master the language in the hope of achieving socio-economic and educational empowerment. The challenges surrounding the teaching and learning of English in South African schools has been longstanding. The website of the group Cultural Survival (2015), that acts as an advocate for indigenous people’s rights, contains an article dated Spring of 1982. The author of this article, Marjorie, explained the situation at the time concerning English in the educational sector in South Africa, stating that after the well-known Soweto riots of 1976, the government gave permission to individual school boards to choose their LoLT, and the majority chose English. Marjorie (1982) explained that there were obstacles to learning English: in many urban areas and schools, teachers spoke English in a distinctly “African” way that could “at times be almost unintelligible to native English-speakers”. Marjorie (1982) continued that only then (around 1982) did a requirement come into being for the teachers in some Black schools to have a high-school certificate. This would mean that, up until then, there were teachers of English who had very little formal training (where formal training refers to school grades completed) who taught English to learners, even learners in their final school year. From the above, one can see that the LoLT in schools has been a controversial issue for long time.

Despite English being a widely-used LoLT in South African schools, Harvey (2013:3), in a presentation presented to the South African Principals Association (SAPA), found English to be a barrier to learning and teaching: English as the LoLT in the majority of South African schools has negatively impacted not only English as a subject but also content subjects. According to Harvey (2013:4), the explanation is that learners who write an examination in a language other than their mother tongue are inclined to experience difficulty in fully interpreting the questions as well as challenges in phrasing their responses. In a study on the views of Western Cape intermediate phase teachers, Navsaria, Pascoe and Kathard (2011) found that an estimated 70% of learners were not meeting the written language outcomes for their grade, leaving only 30% of the learners who were able to write according to grade expectations. Harvey (2013:4) also states that many learners are not able to cope with the demands of reading and writing set by assessment activities, amongst other challenges. Apart from the difficulties mentioned above, Harvey (2013:5) identified the following barriers to learner performance posed by the widespread use of English as LoLT: (1) poor understanding of verbs like *explain*, *discuss*, *compare* and *contrast*, as used in assessment; (2) an inability to write a coherent and cohesive paragraph using evidence from the source; (3) an inability to write a coherent essay following instructions, and (4) inadequate literacy skills to write proper paragraphs, across all subjects.

The abovementioned study of Navsaria et al. (2011) indicated that teachers were concerned about the development of written language and listed the following reasons for students not being proficient in the intermediate phase of schooling: (1) limited reading and writing opportunities; (2) limited training of teachers; (3) language barriers; (4) lack of resources in the school; (5) unsafe home environments; (6) lack of parental support due to poor foundation skills in reading and writing, and (7) limited reading and writing outside of school, or aliteracy.

As stated above, many parents and caregivers in South Africa believe that English is the best LoLT for their children⁵ (Vosloo 2009:120-123). According to Heugh (2012:7), there is a notion in education that the earlier and the greater the exposure to English (coupled with a comparative decline in the use of the mother tongue), the better the proficiency that will be achieved in English. Heugh (2012:7), however, states that this notion is unfounded and that the opposite in fact holds true, namely if one uses a mother tongue in education, it is more likely that students will perform well in English and in the overall curriculum. In this regard, Heugh (2012:6) states that classroom observation and assessment data have indicated that using English as LoLT does not result in better English learning

⁵ Chetty (2012) states that, to this end, some Black and Coloured children do not attend the schools near their homes because of the desire to access schools with English as LoLT; learners (or their parents) regard this as crucial for cultivating entry into formal middle-class employment and lifestyles.

but that regions with stronger mother-tongue schooling have higher learner achievement levels at Grade 8 in all subjects, including English.

According to Taylor and Coetzee (2013:19), in the current primary school system, the LoLT is one of the most important inputs into the production of education, but the predominant indigenous home languages (those spoken by the majority of children) are not well-developed for academic purposes. Taylor and Coetzee (2013) state that this is one of the reasons why English is adopted as LoLT from a very early age, where some primary schools have chosen to implement mother-tongue education for the first three years after which there is a switch to English at the beginning of Grade 4. So, although most primary schools use English as their LoLT, the majority of the children in these schools do not speak English as mother tongue and, because of that, children with an African language as mother tongue perform significantly worse than English L1 speakers (Taylor and Coetzee 2013:19). The majority of the participants in the current study were non-L1 speakers of English who had English as official LoLT at school, and all were studying at university level through the medium of English. In the next section, I discuss the position of English in the South African tertiary education system.

2.6 Language policies, their implementation in the South African tertiary education sector, and the implementation of language policies

Despite South Africa being a multilingual country, tertiary education in South Africa is a fairly monolingual context. There is an ever-growing emphasis on the transformation of the language policies of tertiary institutions, as already discussed in the Language Policy for Higher Education of 2002 (Ministry of Education 2002). According to the Ministry of Education (2002:2), South Africa's many languages have not always been working together as a whole because the linguistic diversity was used as "an instrument of control, oppression and exploitation". Transformation in this regard has been given some consideration, especially in the education sector, as indicated in the following excerpt: "The Ministry agrees with the Council on Higher Education that consideration should be given to the development of other South African languages for use in instruction, as part of a medium- to long-term strategy to promote multilingualism" (Language Policy for Higher Education 2002:10).

Although it was recommended more than 10 years ago that the development of languages other than English for use at tertiary level be considered, there is still little evidence of transformation of the language environment at tertiary education level. Kapp and Bangeni (2011:9) found that "institutional transformation remains mainly at the level of symbolic gesture – facilitating access, re-naming

buildings or using multiple languages in institutional communication”. The following discussion will be on the language policies of South African universities.

According to the CHE’s Language Policy Framework for South African Higher Education (2001:3), two main values should be promoted: “firstly, the importance of studying through the language one knows best, or as it is popularly referred to, mother-tongue education, and secondly, the fostering of multilingualism”. According to the CHE (2001:3), receiving an early grounding in one’s mother-tongue is a good pedagogical approach to learning, and multicultural communication should have governmental support.⁶ In the same 2001 report, the figures at that time were as follows: of 21 universities, 16 used English as LoLT, and the other five institutions used English and Afrikaans. Stellenbosch University was the only university at which, at undergraduate level, Afrikaans was the only official language of tuition according to the language policy (although English-medium tuition was routinely allowed)⁷ (CHE 2001:4). In the following table, I provide a summary of the language policies of some South African universities and the implementation of these policies.

Table 2.1: Language policies of some South African universities

| Institution | Policy date | Summary of language policy as found on the institution’s web page |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| University of Cape Town | 2003 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use English as the LoLT and the language of administration; • In the language and literature departments, teach in South African languages other than English; • Use English for examination except in those language and literature departments where another language is taught; • Ensure that all applicants have attained a certain level of proficiency in English; • Ensure that English communication is clear, concise and gender-sensitive. |
| University of the Free State | 2003 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multilingualism is sought and promoted by two main languages, Afrikaans and English, including phasing in and developing Sesotho; • To improve equity, access and success in higher education in the Free State and central regions; • To develop Afrikaans as an academic and scientific language; • To promote and support the development of Sesotho as a scientific language in the medium and long term; • Practical classes may be offered on a double medium. |

⁶ The South African Government’s website (2015) states that it is perceived that African languages do not have the same development and utility as English and Afrikaans, and thus Government will ensure that all African languages are equally developed and used by learners in the best interest of learning and performance in the 12 years of schooling. To pass the National Senior Certificate with admission to Bachelor studies, there is a requirement to pass four subjects “with 50% and the remaining subjects with 30%, provided that the home language is passed with 40% and the language of learning and teaching with 30%”.

⁷ Note that the January 2015 language policy of this university allows for English and Afrikaans as languages of tuition at undergraduate level, with English being the default language at postgraduate level. This language policy is discussed in some detail below.

| | | |
|---------------------------------|------|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning situations with specific language requirements (including the presence of deaf, partially sighted or blind persons) are dealt with in flexible and sensitive ways; • To create an empowering environment for the development of staff's language skills and multilingualism; • Institute and phase in appropriate, affordable and effective multilingual support services, procedures and technology. |
| University of the Witwatersrand | 2003 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support staff to use English and African languages in both social and work contexts; • Develop the linguistic abilities of staff; • Develop the linguistic abilities of students; • Develop the Sesotho language; • Support multilingualism. |
| Rhodes University | 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the official languages of South Africa; • Promote multilingualism and the intellectualisation of African languages; • Create conditions for the use of particularly isiXhosa as a language of learning and eventually also teaching; • Do not let language act as a barrier to equity of access, opportunity and success; • Widely distribute the policy to all members of the University community. |
| University of Johannesburg | 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise different languages and respect the Constitution as regards language rights and language use; • Acknowledge various languages of multilingualism as expressed in the Language Policy for Higher Education of the Department of Education; • Recognise the need to use the first (home) language in learning; • Recognise a student's right to choose a language of instruction; • Recognise the multilingual nature of the province of Gauteng, with Sesotho, isiZulu, English and Afrikaans being the preferred languages. |
| University of KwaZulu-Natal | 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the position of English as the dominant language of instruction, and develop isiZulu for use in all higher education functions; • Develop isiZulu for use in instruction as a medium- to long-term strategy to promote bilingualism;⁸ • Provide language and academic literacy development programmes in English and isiZulu to ensure that language does not act as a barrier to access and success. |
| University of South Africa | 2010 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make tuition available in the official languages of South Africa on the basis of functional multilingualism; • Provide undergraduate modules with a glossary to advance the goal of offering undergraduate programmes in all the official languages; • Present postgraduate subjects in English, provided that an academic department may, on the basis of functional multilingualism, decide to offer modules in one or more of the official languages. • Pro-actively support African languages with a view to them becoming the medium of instruction at higher education level; |

⁸ The University of KwaZulu-Natal acknowledges that the use of isiZulu as medium of instruction will require the development of teaching materials. To achieve this, the university states that it shall work closely with PANSALB (which still existed at that time). The university also acknowledges that the successful implementation of its language policy will depend on the injection of substantial financial resources from the State, as undertaken in the Language Policy for Higher Education.

| | | |
|------------------------|------|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest resources in improving language proficiency, particularly in English, to enable students to access the library and other sources of information and to enhance academic literacy in their fields of study. |
| University of Pretoria | 2010 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use two official languages, Afrikaans and English, with Sepedi as a third language of communication; • Offer tuition programmes in either Afrikaans or English or both, provided that there is a demand; • Develop and use Afrikaans and English as academic languages and promote the development of other languages (official and non-official), provided that there is a demand; • Provide staff members with the necessary support and training to enable them to communicate in Afrikaans and in English; • Clients shall have the right to choose whether the University should communicate with them in Afrikaans or English. |
| North-West University | 2012 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setswana, English and Afrikaans are employed as official languages and Sesotho has working-language status for use at Vaal Triangle Campus; • Enhancement of access and success remains the primary premise for the language policy for teaching-learning and assessment; • The implementation of functional multilingualism for working, administrative and linguistic purposes takes place in a systematic and goal-oriented way; • Researchers are encouraged to publish their research results in language(s) accessible to scholarly peers; • The language choice for research outputs remains with individual researchers; • Structures exist aiming to improve individual skills within the academic, administrative and student environments; • Staff and students are encouraged to broaden their multilingual skills in order to function effectively in different contexts; • Language editing and translation services are offered by the Inst. Language Directorate. |

| | | |
|---|------|--|
| Stellenbosch University ⁹ | 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afrikaans and English are the LoLTs and are used in various configurations; • Parallel-medium teaching and real-time educational interpreting are used as the preferred options; • Promote institutional multilingualism by employing Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa; • Make documentation of importance available in Afrikaans and English; • Official communication and documentation will be in the language of preference of the partner, and where the University cannot fulfil the language preference, the medium of communication will be English. |
| University of Limpopo | N/A | No policy available online. |
| University of Venda | N/A | No policy available online. |
| Vaal University of Technology (Fouche 2015) | 2003 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English is the only language used for tuition and all courses will be offered in English only. All first year and new undergraduate students are to complete a compulsory English second language and literacy programme; • English is used for assessment and for all study and learner guides, readers, book lists, project instructions, directives, and supplemental and other class notes or study material; • English is the official language of the Institution. All written communication is to be in English; where reasonably practicable, staff and students may communicate informally amongst themselves in the language(s) of their choice; |

⁹ Challenges concerning the language policies of universities were news throughout South Africa at the beginning of 2016. As mentioned in Chapter 1, there were many protests against Afrikaans as LoLT. The political campaign #Afrikaansmustfall was one of the major campaigns leading to demonstrations at the University of Pretoria. Raborife (2016) reports, however, that the political party Afriforum asked South Africans to promote multilingualism at higher education institutions, rather than demanding that Afrikaans be eliminated. Quintal (2015) reports that EFF party leader Julius Malema stated that Afrikaans must no longer be “imposed on people and should be put in its place” because “there are some elements who think Afrikaans is more superior than other [...] local languages” in response to a question about Stellenbosch University’s language policy. Issues with the University’s language policy, however, preceded #Afrikaansmustfall. Giliomee (2015) comments on the conflict that arose over a decision to make English the medium of instruction and of official communication, said to have occurred without following proper procedures. Giliomee (2015) states that Afrikaans is recognised as a mother tongue that has “domesticated” all the scientific concepts, even more so than Hindi and Arabic, but that English was described as the “common language of the country” and that it would become the medium of instruction, with large classes having Afrikaans as medium of instruction on parallel offer. Giliomee (2015) said that Prof. Wim de Villiers, the rector and vice-chancellor of Stellenbosch University, decided that English will therefore be the language of official and public communications in residences. The Language Policy of Stellenbosch University (2016:2) states that the aim is to engage knowledge in a diverse society by increasing access to the university for all students and staff and to facilitate pedagogically-sound teaching and learning by using the province’s three official languages, namely Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa. Other aims in the Language Policy of Stellenbosch University (2016:3) include:

- Equality and the prohibition against direct and indirect unfair discrimination on the basis on language;
- Enabling inclusivity and equitable access to the university for all prospective and current students and staff;
- Facilitating effective learning and teaching, research, and service delivery at the university, and
- Promoting multilingualism as an important differentiating characteristic of the university.

SABC (2016) reports that the changes implemented through this language policy evoked mixed reactions. Student Representative Council members welcomed the changes, saying that it is a step towards ensuring that all students have access to information and that it is not a measure against Afrikaans. SABC (2016) reports, however, that some language experts and a former council member are not supportive of this change; the former Council Member Prof. Herman Giliomee was “shocked” and “disappointed” that Stellenbosch University can walk away from its Afrikaans heritage. SABC (2016) reports that the policy was voted in by the University Council, but that the final decision angered some opposing council members to such an extent that they left the boardroom. The increased use of English at Stellenbosch University is viewed by some as an attack on, or at least damaging to, Afrikaans’ position as language of higher education and technology, and debate on the issue continues at the time of writing.

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote English as the official language of the Institution and guide the University community towards functional multilingualism; • Establish medium- and long-term goals to advance the English language planning and development process; review the Institutional language policy every five years; • The University must establish an African Language Development Department with the aim of offering undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in, amongst others, Sesotho and isiZulu. |
|--|--|--|

As can be seen in this table, many universities acknowledge multilingualism and/or officially state that one or more African languages should be used or developed alongside English (in some cases, English and Afrikaans). At most universities, however, English is the default LoLT in the classroom. I will now discuss the implementation of language policies in general. Towards the end of the chapter, I will discuss the challenges posed by using English as LoLT in South African tertiary education institutions.

Spolsky (2004:143) states that when a language is declared the official language of a country, there should at the very least be a requirement that that official language is taught in the school system as a matter of priority. According to Töttemeyer (2009:4), implementation of multilingual education policies accepted by politicians is very often difficult or even almost impossible, because the number of mother-tongue teachers is usually inadequate: not anyone who speaks a language can by default teach that language, and there is usually a lack of funding to develop mother-tongue training programmes for teachers at tertiary institutions. From Töttemeyer's work (2009:4), it becomes clear that if such language policies are to be implemented successfully, vast funding will be required for the writing and publishing of readers and set books in several languages as well as the creation of many new posts. Also, Töttemeyer (2009:4) explains that in spite of policies favouring mother-tongue education, there are African governments that are indifferent to universal mother-tongue education, because the government officials are part of a small elite who speak the colonial languages fluently and who send their children to private schools and to universities in the developed world. There is thus not always the political will to implement the official language policy.

In this regard, Foley (2004:58) notes that it is possible theoretically to develop South Africa's indigenous languages academically, but practically "the simple truth is that it is not going to happen", especially not in the short- or medium term. Foley (2004:59) states that reasons for this are political, social, linguistic, and economic, which are said to be interconnected. As indicated above, for many years, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has had the vision of developing all the official languages of South Africa into academic languages. DHET (2002:5) records that higher education needs to ensure a synchronised development of the multilingual environment, where all

languages develop as academic/scientific languages. Furthermore, each public higher education institution, along with its senate, must determine its language policy and must ensure that the existing medium of instruction does not become a barrier to students. However, 12 years after these statements by the DHET, Drummond (2016:76) found, in a case study of two universities, failures to implement the institutions' own language policies – the institutions had not achieved their stated aim of providing multilingual signs on their campuses, let alone their aim of using an African language as medium of instruction. According to Drummond (2016:78), it is evident that accountability is avoided by these institutions because of highly conditional language in the policy documents (such as referring to demands and resources to function). Drummond (2016:78) concludes that single institutions cannot change national sentiments towards English or transform language practices in the education sector, and suggests that a national language planning body could succeed by instantiating new policies which are perhaps the key to providing genuine transformation across the sector. At this point in time, however, it can be concluded that there has been little (if any) progress made on the implementation of mother-tongue education at tertiary level.

2.7 Challenges regarding the use of English in higher education in South Africa

According to Foley (2004:63), one of the unfortunate aspects of the language policies of higher education institutions is that they construct the use of English as a problem rather than as a valuable national resource. In this section, I will discuss some of the challenges surrounding multilingualism in the higher education sector of South Africa. I endeavoured to take care to present English-only education and mother-tongue education as neither culprits nor unproblematic practices. The focus in this section is not on the importance of English as the lingua franca of the world or even the country, but rather on the position of English as a medium of instruction within tertiary education institutions of South Africa and in the broader context in which media of instruction in tertiary education are used. I begin, though, by referring to language used in schools.

2.7.1 Proficiency in English and in the mother tongue

Davis (2013) states that there is an accelerated sense of urgency within the Department of Basic Education regarding the quality and quantity of African language teaching because of a belief that many of the country's problems in the education system are related to language issues. Davis (2013) quoted Mathanzima Mwelil (Acting Deputy Director General: Curriculum) as saying that "learning outcomes are poor because of poor language proficiency" and that "research has confirmed this on various occasions, but very little has been done by institutions or civil society to address this

problem”. Cook (2013) states that there are two beliefs in this regard. The first is that the key to resolving the education crisis in South Africa is to drastically improve the education and training of language teachers, whether it is in Afrikaans, English or an indigenous South African language. The second is that African-language-speaking children drop their mother tongue too early and that learning in a language they do not understand causes difficulties in learning concepts, reading and writing as well as learning English (Cook 2013).

Posel and Zeller (2010:1) collected data on language ability in a nationally representative household survey, the National Income Dynamics Study, which captured information on the reading and writing abilities in the individuals’ mother tongues and in English. Posel and Zeller (2010:19) found that approximately 65% of all South African adults are proficient (reading and writing “very well”) in their mother tongues, and that the corresponding percentage for English language proficiency was approximately 47%. The authors, however, acknowledge that individuals are likely to over-report or overestimate their language proficiency (Posel and Zeller 2010:20). That said, there is still a general lack of reading and writing proficiency amongst adults, whether in English or in their mother tongue. This poses a problem for tertiary institutions at which young adults enrol because often these adults lack sufficient literacy skills in general literacy and in academic literacy in particular.

2.7.2 General aliteracy in South Africa

Corder (2013) conducted a study amongst urban South African adults who had attended or were still attending high school and found high incidences of aliteracy in this population (Corder 2013:469), where a person is seen as aliterate if s/he can read but chooses not to. One in four persons were categorised as aliterate, two in five Black persons and one in four Indian persons (Corder 2013:472). Amongst the elderly, aliteracy levels were at 43% amongst Blacks, Coloureds and Indians, and 8% amongst Whites. There was also a strong link between aliteracy and low income levels, although aliteracy did also occur amongst some adults with high incomes. Corder (2013:1) found a correlation between reading and writing in aliterate people: they generally do not write, and those who read are more likely to have written and to have consulted a dictionary.

Widespread aliteracy, such as that found in South Africa, negatively influences indigenous languages with regard to their development as academic languages, which in turn leaves few options for transformation in terms of LoLTs used in institutions of higher education. Aliteracy can be seen as one of the important factors influencing the future of education in South Africa: on the one hand, many schooled adults choose not to read or write, demonstrating little or no desire to make use of

anything but the spoken form of language after leaving school. On the other hand, there is a call from certain quarters to develop indigenous languages as languages which can be used as languages of literacy at the highest level of study.

2.7.3 The perceived status of the relevant languages

Rudwich (2015) states that any language can acquire a stigma because of the socio-political circumstances surrounding it. For example, Afrikaans was viewed as the “language of the oppressor” during the apartheid era and has not rid itself of this label, even with the majority of Afrikaans speakers today being “Coloured”, and not White Afrikaners (Rudwich 2015). The dissatisfaction with Afrikaans as LoLT has been thoroughly expressed by political marches against this practice. The #Afrikaansmustfall protests are just one example of public discontent¹⁰ with the slow implementation of language transformation in South Africa.

Like Afrikaans, English was also once seen as the language of oppression in South Africa and also in many other countries.¹¹ Marjorie (1982) explains that in 1652, the European settlers spoke Dutch which eventually, through language contact (amongst others), evolved into Afrikaans. The British gained control in 1822 and then announced English as the language of schools, churches and government. As a result, Afrikaans was actively banned from use in most domains, leading to Afrikaners viewing English as a language of oppression.

Regarding the University of KwaZulu-Natal introducing isiZulu as a compulsory subject for all its undergraduate students, isiZulu was pointed out as not being a “pan-African language” or a transnational language like Swahili. Rudwich (2015) explains that Swahili is the lingua franca in African countries such as Tanzania and Kenya, and that making isiZulu compulsory is a “political decision that may contribute to linguistic and cultural nationalism”. This is despite Rudwich’s (2015) statement that implementing the teaching of isiZulu at tertiary level is too late for students to develop academic literacy in the language, and that the early practice of academic reading and writing in African languages should be implemented.

¹⁰ Raborife (2016) reported that Afrikaans-speaking students state that the aggression against Afrikaans as LoLT was not from Black students in general but rather from EFF students in particular, and that the issue is thus not racial but rather political.

¹¹ English was, for instance, seen as oppressive by the Irish. Consider in this regard the quotation given by Crowley (2000:38): “Irish habits for men and women to be abolished, and the English tongue to be extended [...] – Sir Henry Sidney 1585”. According to the BBC (2014), in the 19th century, speaking Welsh was seen as a drawback and there was the assumption that the moral and material condition of the Welsh people would only improve if English was introduced. BBC (2014) states that this period is associated with the most hated symbol of English cultural oppression during that period, namely the “Welsh Not”, a piece of wood with the letters “WN” on it that was hung around the neck of children who spoke in Welsh. The “Welsh Not” was a common means of forcing Welsh children to speak English at school.

According to Alexander (2004:121), the biggest obstacle for the development of African languages is that the majority of the mother-tongue speakers of these languages believe that their languages should not be used for higher-order functions, but should instead be preserved and maintained in the spheres of family, community and church. Vale (2016) reported that the number of students that study an African language at tertiary education level¹² are “still” declining, with reasons including no demand for linguistically diverse graduates, options of study that do not include African languages, and the possibility that, ideologically, English is the only relevant language.

This discussion serves to demonstrate that languages are not “neutral”, and that the language(s) chosen as LoLT(s) may be perceived in different ways by different sectors of the student and staff body of a university. A LoLT, English or otherwise, is implemented against the backdrop of the local and international history and perceived status of that language.

2.7.4 Multilingualism in the staff and student body

Based on their research on language and academic performance, Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015:31) state that academic performance at universities in South Africa is a cause of concern, and that language is regarded as one of the main contributors to this problem. Considering the work of Edwards (2013), a possible reason for this could be that in multilingual contexts, communication problems may exist because of a lack of competence in the lingua franca, and thus a lingua franca along with translation is required. Edwards (2013) explains that competence involves skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, and entails vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and more, but that strength in one skill or domain does not necessarily mean strength in the others.

Considering LoLTs in multilingual contexts, some argue that using English as the only LoLT will be more beneficial to students, whereas others are of the opinion that it is better to be taught in a multilingual environment so that concepts can be discussed in students’ mother tongues, leading to better comprehension. On this topic, Heugh, Benson, Bogale and Yohannes (2007:126) explain that the role of language in education is that of a communicative tool to assist the process of academic achievement, and that in multilingual societies it is a requirement to have several languages to facilitate the best opportunity for academic achievement. According to Heugh et al. (2007:126), this means that a single language is not enough for academic achievement and to ensure that students reach the highest

¹² On the topic of the current situation of African languages in school, Vale (2016) reports that although the curriculum for languages is the same, the examination papers do not require students to apply themselves in African languages, resulting in easy passes and scores of up to 90% for these languages.

level of academic expertise. Similarly, Vosloo (2009:48), in a study on the role of culture in teaching and learning through English L2 at the VUT, found that students needed to be provided with linguistic, intercultural and communicative skills to adequately express themselves regarding their own culture. The author found that 75% of the students interviewed preferred being taught in English because they were of the opinion that it would help them to communicate with other people and prepare them for the workplace (Vosloo 2009:120-123). Upon interviewing a sample of lecturers, Vosloo (2009:167) found that although the lecturers were all English L2 speakers, they did not find it challenging to teach in English. When it comes to teaching English as a L2, however, the author found that lecturers would sometimes refer back to their mother tongue, but that these expressions of gratitude, for instance, could have a positive impact on interaction in classes (Vosloo 2009:167-168).

In summary, Vosloo (2009) found that students preferred English as LoLT, even though, according to the research of Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015), academic problems arise due in part to English being used as LoLT in contexts in which students lack proficiency in English. Lecturers in Vosloo's (2009) study reported being comfortable lecturing in English which is their L2, but still made use of code-switching to their L1s. In the next section, code switching in educational contexts is discussed.

2.7.5 Code switching

A study done by Uys (2010:52) showed that code switching and code mixing is a reality in South African primary- and secondary school classrooms, where the term "code switching" refers to alternations of language within a single conversation by even one speaker in one sentence (Uys 2010:4). It was found that teachers used code switching mainly for academic purposes that included explaining and clarifying subject content. Code switching was also frequently used for social reasons (Rose 2006, Uys 2010:52). These included for teachers to maintain their social relationships with their learners, to be humorous and for classroom-management purposes like reprimanding learners, but never solely for establishing their identity. Uys (2010:52) also found that the code switching constituted good academic practice and therefore recommended that code switching in the classroom be encouraged, especially where the LoLT is the mother tongue of very few of the learners (Uys 2010:52).

Nel and Müller (2010:647) found that the teaching of English is successful when learners are supported through code switching, collaborative teaching, and immediate and correct feedback. Nel and Müller (2010:647) explain that non-English-speaking South African students who have an African language as mother tongue prefer to be taught in English, particularly at university level. Wong (2009:127) states that it was found that students are generally in favour of using solely English

as the LoLT in English language classrooms, and this preference is positively related to the student's proficiency in English. Wong (2009:127) concludes that if teachers allow one or more native languages to be used in an English language classroom, students' opportunities to learn English are reduced. This then calls into question the desirability of using code switching in the language classroom, which does not concur with Nel and Müller's (2010:647) findings discussed above.

Heugh (2012:30) states that most South African teachers do not have sufficient English proficiency to teach in English, and that they mostly do not use English in their classrooms even though they think they should and even say they do. As seen above, the reality is that teachers code switch in many instances.

2.8 Chapter conclusion

Prasad (2014:52), discussing linguistic repertoires, states that an individual may have changeable degrees of proficiency in any of the languages that form part of his/her linguistic repertoire. She states that the focus is not on developing equal proficiency in all languages but rather on developing the ability to negotiate a variety of communicative activities and awareness in the various languages (Prasad 2014:52). This might be the ideal, but the reality looks somewhat different, as I will explain below.

Chetty (2012) states that because of the policy makers in the 1950s, African schoolchildren in South Africa had to reach a certain level of proficiency in the official languages of the time, namely Afrikaans and English. The aim of this policy was to "make the country governable" and to ease communication in the workplace. Chetty (2012) elaborates by saying that African children had to switch from mother tongue as LoLT to English or Afrikaans as LoLT in high school, and because of this (bearing in mind the issue of poor quality of language education provided to African children at the time), these children were barely functional in the target language. The promotion of bilingualism and use of the mother tongue as LoLT in the current political dispensation has not been very successful, as there are no clear guidelines on how to implement the policy given by the Department of Education in the face of limited resources to do so. This means that the language policy has had very little impact in practice, and that in politics, media and education, English is the preferred language. The level of English that is offered and mastered in most schools is still inadequate, and this may be partially attributable to the quality of learning in the mother tongue that has preceded the switch to English (Chetty 2012). Whatever the reason for the underdeveloped English skills, the reality is that many South African students arrive at their tertiary education institutions with these underdeveloped English skills, and that they then learn and access teaching activities in a context which is dominated by English.

To summarise the conclusions regarding the linguistic situation in South African education, English is the dominant lingua franca in South Africa and the language of preference in the education system, amongst others, because little progress has been made with implementing mother-tongue education. Non-English-speaking students prefer to be taught in English, including at university level. Many South African universities in their language policies acknowledge multilingualism and that African languages should be used or developed alongside English. However, English is the default LoLT in almost all university classrooms. The teaching of English is found to be successful when learners are supported through code switching, collaborative teaching, and immediate and correct feedback. In the next chapter, I will describe the methodology used to investigate the position of English in the linguistic repertoires of non-English-L1 students at a South African university of technology. In the following chapters, when discussing my findings, I will return to the matter of using English as sole LoLT in tertiary classrooms.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss the specific approach that was followed during data collection and data analysis. Firstly, I will discuss the participants (including how they were recruited for participation), the context in which they studied and the particular school context of the subgroup of participants who were from Limpopo. Thereafter, the data collection instruments will be discussed as well as the manner in which the language portraits were analysed. I will conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of ethical issues pertaining to the study.

3.1 The research participants

Recall that the interest of this study was to ascertain what the multilingual repertoires of VUT students are, focusing on where English lies within these repertoires. The aim was to establish how these repertoires of languages are used in teaching and learning among students.

In order to answer the research questions set out in section 1.3, I recruited second-year VUT students who were registered for the second and third module of Applied Communication Skills¹³, known as ACS2.1 and ACS2.2, respectively. The full complement of those on the Vanderbijlpark campus of the VUT who were registered for these modules was approached, and a sample consisting of 127 students was used for the first set of data. The participants were requested to complete a language background questionnaire and to take part in an exercise, namely each drawing a language portrait to represent their language repertoires. From these portraits, a general profile was able to be drawn up of the linguistic resources of the full set of registered second-year students in the modules.

The first criterion for participation in the study was that the students had to be registered for the second-year level ACS subjects, regardless of whether they were repeaters or first-time admissions to the subject. (Some students would have been repeating the subject, but no attempt was made to identify and exclude them from participation.). Each semester, a different module of ACS1 and ACS2 is presented: in the first semester, modules 1.1 (first year) and 2.1 (second year) are presented, with modules 1.2 (first year) and 2.2 (second year) being presented in the second semester. The first number

¹³ ACS is a compulsory subject at the VUT that has to be completed by every student regardless of the course that student is doing. Students who come to the VUT from other tertiary institutions where they had successfully completed a similar type of subject do not receive credit for that subject and hence are not exempt from having to complete ACS2. To graduate, all students must complete this service subject. Another service subject, deemed as important as ACS2, is English Development and Learning (EDL) which is also offered by the Communication and Education Department.

of the module indicates the year level, and the second number indicates the semester, therefore module 2.1 and 2.2 are presented in the first and second semesters of the second year, respectively.

The second criterion was that participants had to be assigned to my ACS2 classes. There are approximately 30 lecturers presenting ACS2 in the Communication and Education Department because the student enrolment for this subject is high, with numbers of about 3 500 first-year and 2 800 second-year students. As explained in footnote 13, this high enrolment is due to ACS2 being a requirement for all students attending the VUT. The high enrolment makes it highly unlikely for any one lecturer to teach the same group of students in both the first and the second semester. It does, however, happen in some cases that an individual is taught by the same lecturer as classes are arranged according to students' timetable availability and not according to their courses. This can mean, for example, that an Electrical Engineering student can be in a class with Photography and Logistics students in the first semester, but in a different class for the next module, according to what best fits their timetable.

After receiving ethical clearance and institutional permission for conducting the study, all students present during a particular period of my classes were given a language questionnaire and a blank language portrait. A total of 140 questionnaires and language portraits were handed out together with consent forms and, after explaining the instructions, consent form and reason for the study, the students could decide whether or not to participate. A total of 128 students¹⁴ opted to fill in and return the consent forms and questionnaires. There were no limits on the number of students who had to complete the questionnaire, nor were there any selection criteria regarding participant gender, age, or cultural or linguistic background. One questionnaire was omitted from the data, bringing the total to 127 because, despite attending one of my lectures, the person who completed the questionnaire was not one of my students.

Of the 127 questionnaires returned, only one student did not indicate his/her gender. A total of 57 (45%) participants were female and 69 (54%) were male. Participants were requested to indicate the year of their birth on the questionnaire: most participants (96; 76%) were born between 1993 and 1996, making them 20 to 22 years old at the time of data collection. One student – the oldest at 36 years – was born in 1979, with the remainder (29; 23%) born from 1983 to 1992 and thus being 23 to 33 years old at the time of data collection.

¹⁴ Note that I had originally planned to collect data in 2015 only, so that I would only study one year group. However, obtaining ethical clearance and institutional permission took longer than anticipated, and data collection could therefore only commence in the second semester of 2015 (amongst ACS2.2 students). Fifty-five participants were recruited in this semester. In order to supplement this number so that I would have at least 100 participants, I decided to repeat the data collection process in the first semester of 2016 (amongst ACS2.1 students).

The majority of the participants were from Gauteng (33%), with large groups from Limpopo (28%) and the Free State (20%) as well. As mentioned earlier, the students who participated in the research were enrolled for different courses; 50% of the participants studied either Information Technology, Biotechnology or Electrical Engineering.

Once the completed questionnaires were returned, I scrutinised them to identify candidates who fitted the criteria for the interviews. The specific criteria for these participants were that (1) they had to have listed “Limpopo” as their hometown province, (2) they had to have indicated that they were willing to be interviewed, and (3) they had to have provided either a telephone number or an e-mail address at which I could contact them. Twenty-two participants met these three criteria, and all 22 were invited telephonically or by e-mail for an interview. Not all the students responded to this communication, and finally only eight interviews were conducted. Of the eight interview participants, seven were male and one was female. The schooling of Limpopo learners is discussed in some detail below, in order to provide an indication of what educational experience the interviewed participants would have had before enrolling as students at the VUT.

3.2 The Limpopo school system

Pasensie (2015:1) states that in South Africa there are 25 720 ordinary public schools, of which 11 2521 are designated rural schools and the majority of these “rural schools are situated in three provinces: KwaZulu-Natal (4 040), Limpopo (3 342) and the Eastern Cape (1 832)”. In this section, I focus specifically on the Limpopo region.

In 2013, the *Mail & Guardian*, amongst many other sources, investigated the state of the South African public education system and found it to be dire. The *Mail & Guardian* (2013) reported that some schools, like the Alapha Secondary School in Limpopo, have broken windows and unhygienic (actually foul) pit latrines. In addition to the insufficient infrastructure which was in a state of disrepair, pass rates were unsatisfactory: in 2012, not one of the 20 learners at the abovementioned school passed their matriculation examinations, contributing to the failing public education system which is ranked one of the worst in the world. The *Mail & Guardian* (2013) explains that, despite education receiving the largest share of the national budget (R232.5 billion for education in 2013), many schools have no libraries, laboratories or equipment to teach certain subjects, and Limpopo was the province that was most severely hit by the government’s failure to supply textbooks for an entire academic year. The *Mail & Guardian* (2013) quoted Limpopo Education Department spokesperson at the time, Pat Kgomo, as saying that the situation at Alapha Secondary School was “cause for

concern, but not unique” as four other schools in the province also had a 0% pass rate in 2012. According to the *Mail & Guardian* (2013), the government blames the state of affairs partly on its inability to attract teachers (despite a 25% unemployment rate), saying that few teachers are willing to work in remote rural areas, and teachers who do accept posts in these areas are overworked to such an extent that the principals actively have to take part in teaching. The above concerns were raised in 2013, but have not yet been addressed. In a 2016 National Council of Provinces NCOP Education and Recreation meeting, Lungela Zwane, the Chairperson of the NCOP, noted that there is concern about the performance of some provinces (including Limpopo) which have shown a decline in matriculation pass rates (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2016). Thandi Mpambo-Sibhukwana, a member of the Democratic Alliance in the Western Cape, stated in this same NCOP Education and Recreation meeting that it was found that there is a practice for trained language teachers who were bursary beneficiaries (and who thus have to be employed as stipulated in their bursary conditions) to be assigned to teach mathematics instead of languages, (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2016).

Buchholz Mort (2016) states that rural schools tend to be poorly resourced due to a lack of proper furniture and enough teachers and textbooks, amongst others. According to Buchholz Mort (2016), most rural learners are taught in their mother tongues, not in English, and although some do learn in English, there are very few opportunities to practice speaking it. For this reason, rural learners tend not to perform as well in their final examinations as their urban counterparts. The following will aim to clarifying what is meant by “rural schools” as most of the schools in Limpopo are classified as rural.

Pasensie (2015:1) states that ‘rurality’ is a difficult concept to explain as it is very broadly and loosely defined in South Africa, making it problematic to address the many challenges of “rural” schools. The definition of “rural” given in South Africa, according to the research of Pasensie (2015:1), is an area located within the former homelands (that is, areas with many tribal lands controlled by traditional authorities) and the former White commercial farming districts. Furthermore, “rural education” is defined as “the provision of [...] education in schools in areas with tribal authorities, farming communities and densely populated settlements outside of urban areas”. According to Pasensie (2015:1), the working definition of “rural” needs to be revised and refined – in accordance with countries like Japan, Scotland and the USA which clearly define, in legislation, what a rural school is. Pasensie (2015:1-2) states that in these countries, definitions depend on the population size of the community where the schools are located, as well as remoteness, inaccessibility and isolation.

According to Pasensie (2015:3), some of the challenges of rural education are the same as those of education in South Africa in general, but the location of rural schools intensifies these challenges.

Because of the dire socio-economic status of many rural areas, the challenges of rural schools far outweigh those of their urban counterparts, and rural learners are disadvantaged because of where they live (Pasensie 2015:3).

From the above, one can deduce that there are major challenges for learners in Limpopo to fare well enough at school in order to be accepted into tertiary level institutions. One can assume that English is not routinely used as LoLT in Limpopo schools (regardless of the language policies of these rural schools), especially if one considers that some language teachers (presumably those with comparatively high proficiency in English) are employed to teach mathematics. If this is the case, the English instruction in Limpopo schools can be anticipated to be substandard.

3.3 Data collection methods and instruments

As previously stated, I collected data by making use of a language questionnaire, language portraits, and individual interviews. I also analysed English essays of the students I interviewed to obtain a measure of their English language proficiency. Their school and university marks for English were also sourced in order to provide an indication of their English language proficiency. In this section, I will discuss the data collection methods and instruments in detail.

3.3.1 Language questionnaire

The language questionnaire was distributed during one of each of the 11 ACS2 classes that I taught at the time of data collection. There were five classes in the second semester of 2015 and six classes in the first semester of 2016. The questionnaire was briefly discussed in class to give the students some background on the aim of the study, and the consent form was read out loud to make sure that all students were aware of its contents and could thus make an informed choice whether or not to take part in the study. Those that did not want to participate were requested to return the empty questionnaires and consent forms, and were dismissed for the rest of that particular period.

The language questionnaire (see Appendix A) asked students to provide biographical information (such as their gender and age), information on their home towns and schools attended, and specific information about the languages they speak (such as which languages they speak; where they speak them; and how well they understand, speak, read and write them). The last section of the questionnaire asked about their LoLT, such as what their LoLT was at school and what their current language of preference is for group work.

3.3.2 Language portraits

Prasad (2014:70) found that self-portraits can play a powerful role in helping students represent their diverse cultural and linguistic identities because the activity makes visible their multilingual repertoires. Prasad (2014:70) states that a creative visual methodology can also provide a way of accessing and understanding the participant's voice and experiences without limiting him/her to communicating in a given language. A blank language portrait (see Appendix B) was given to all participants. (As stated above, the blank language portraits were handed out at the same time as the consent forms and questionnaires.) Participants were requested to colour in the portrait according to their knowledge of different languages. For example, if they knew four languages, they had to select four colour markers from those provided, indicate which colour represents which language, and colour in the portrait using these four colours.

3.3.3 Individual interviews

Eight students were interviewed regarding their mother tongues and the role that English plays in their lives. These eight students were among 22 suitable candidates, namely those participants who indicated that they were from Limpopo province and were in principle willing to be interviewed. Whereas all 22 were invited to an interview, only eight attended the appointments made. Before the interviews, all 22 students were added to a WhatsApp group where they could freely ask questions about the study in general and the interviews in particular and could discuss their experiences (or they could mute the discussions). This was done in the hope of encouraging more of the candidates to attend their appointment but, despite this effort, students seemed reluctant to be interviewed and, in line with guidelines for ethical research conduct, no further encouragement was given lest I appeared coercive.

As stated in Chapter 1, I chose the students from Limpopo (as opposed to those from another province) to interview for the following reasons:

- (1) The education of students hailing from Limpopo would have been administered by a single regional Department of Education. This would limit variability in terms of the pre-VUT educational experiences of these students.
- (2) The students from Limpopo would presumably have a limited yet interesting variety of mother tongues.
- (3) There are a relatively large number of students from Limpopo at the VUT. (As mentioned above, they formed the second-largest group in the ACS2 cohort, at a total of 28%.) Registered students

from the largest group, namely those from Gauteng, would presumably have been too diverse in terms of L1, given the more cosmopolitan nature of the major cities in Gauteng.

- (4) Code mixing is a common practice in Gauteng, and it could have influenced the in-depth questions on language repertoires in a negative way, which could have resulted in the aims of the study not being reached.

The data obtained from the questionnaires were used to support the findings based on the interview data. In addition, the interview data was analysed by means of thematic analysis, and the main supplementary themes are presented separately from the questionnaire data.

3.3.4 School and university marks

For each of the eight Limpopo participants, I obtained the following set of data from the central university system:¹⁵ (1) the average marks obtained for languages in their NSC examination; (2) the average symbol obtained for English in the NSC examination; (3) the final mark obtained for the first-year EDL course at the VUT, and (4) the final year mark obtained for ACS2. For logistical reasons, it was not possible to obtain all the different scores for all 127 students within the time period, and therefore I only obtained those of the eight interviewed Limpopo students. These scores were considered in light of a written assignment completed by the interviewed participants (discussed in the next section).

These two sets of data (the recorded interviews and the set of language and communication scores taken at various stages over the previous two years) were used in addition to the language background questionnaire and the language portraits to gain a detailed profile of the linguistic repertoires and language biographies of the students from Limpopo province. In addition, this data allowed some measure of the kind of academic proficiency the students had developed since their NSC examinations.

3.3.5 Essay writing

The group of interviewed participants from Limpopo were asked to write an essay on the topic “My life as a student”. These essays were kept anonymous to avoid any discrimination or bias towards the writer. (Recall that all students were in my classes, and that I would have been familiar with their writing skills. In order to avoid previous knowledge of their English writing skills and general proficiency in English influencing my judgement of their essays, I asked them to refrain from writing their names on

¹⁵ Note that the university agreed to make these marks available to me on condition that I do not make them available as exact percentages in my thesis but rather provide a percentage band and/or a description of them.

their essays.) The purpose of this written work was to assist me in collecting data on measurable linguistic elements that will give an impression of each participant's written language proficiency. The marking assessed students' spelling, grammar, vocabulary and punctuation, even though students are not usually penalised for errors in these areas in their ACS2 work.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for conducting the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities of Stellenbosch University and from the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee of the VUT. Institutional permission was also obtained from the VUT. As I was their lecturer, all potential participants were subordinate to me. As such, I took care to stress that their participation was voluntary. As stated above, the questionnaires were stapled together with the consent form to form one document, and were handed out in class. Potential participants were given time to read through the consent form and, as it was requested by one student, I also decided to read it out loud to all potential participants, giving the participants a chance to ask questions if they did not understand any part of the document. The consent form stayed in possession of all potential participants (as mentioned, it was attached to the questionnaire) until they returned questionnaire. This was done so that those who were less proficient in reading English would still be able to obtain all the information needed to make a truly informed decision regarding participation. Hereafter, students had a choice whether or not to complete the questionnaire. The consent form was then signed by those willing to participate, and participants were asked to give their contact information for a possible follow-up interview provided they were willing to be contacted in this regard. When interviewed, each participant was asked to state whether they were willing to participate in the interview. This verbal assent giving was audio-recorded. Participants also gave written permission for their marks and NSC symbols to be obtained from the university.

All participants were assigned a number, in no particular order, and the names of the participants were only available to me and my supervisors (as stated in the consent form) in order to ensure anonymity. The essays were written anonymously to ensure discretion (as explained above). Data was reported in such a manner (see Chapters 4 to 7) that participants would not be identifiable to the readership, not even to their classmates.

Chapter 4: Language profile of all participants

4.1 The manner in which the questionnaire data is reported

In this chapter, the obtained data will be presented along with the interpretation of that data. The aim is to discuss the data and findings section by section as they were obtained by the questionnaires. The first section will be on the results from the questionnaire's questions and findings for all the participants of this study. This is done in an attempt to answer the first research question posed for this study, namely "What is the language profile of the South African 2015 and 2016 contingents of Applied Communication Skills 2 students at the VUT?" Although international students also participated in the questionnaires, and their data was processed in the findings, the focus remained on the profile of the South African participants.

The participants in the study had to indicate what their first and second languages were as well as the position of English within that repertoire. I also wanted to ascertain what languages were part of the participants' NSC and what the average symbol was that they reported to have received for those languages. I will also discuss the data collected on the contexts in which these participants acquired English. Before reporting and interpreting this data, I would like to mention briefly a discrepancy in results on English obtained on two questions, namely "My first language is" and "English is my language". In response to the first question, 4.7% of the participants indicated that English is their L1, but in response to the second, 5.5% indicated English to be their L1. I mention this as a way of acknowledging that the data discussed in this and the following chapters are mostly self-reported data, which created the opportunity for the reporting of perceptions, which may differ from verifiable facts. Also, whereas the obtained data can provide good indications of students' linguistic repertoires and of the position of English in these repertoires, one has to allow for the fact that some students might have misunderstood certain questions slightly (given the varying levels of proficiency in English amongst ACS students) and that this would have affected the answers given to these questions.

4.2 The linguistic profile of the 2015/2016 Applied Communication Skills students at the VUT

Based on their answers to questions about the languages that they know, 24% of the participants were L1 Sesotho speakers and 17% were L1 Sepedi speakers¹⁶ (see Table 4.1). Third and fourth ranking in term of number of L1 speakers were Tshivenda and isiZulu, respectively. The other 41% of the participants spoke a combination of nine other languages as L1. In terms of L2, English was dominant, with 65% of the participants indicating that English was their L2. The next largest L2 was isiZulu (at 11%). Note that French is the L1 of the majority of the international students at the VUT, and 9% of the participants indicated speaking this language as either L1 or L2.

Table 4.1: Languages indicated as L1 and L2

| Language | Percentage of participants | | English indicated as “which” language | Percentage of participants who indicated English as this language |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| | speaking the language as L1 | speaking the language as L2 | | |
| Afrikaans | 0.8 | 4.9 | 1 st Language | 5.5 |
| English | 4.7 | 65 | | |
| French | 5.5 | 3.3 | 2 nd Language | 60.6 |
| Ndebele | 0.8 | 1.6 | | |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 17.3 | 2.4 | 3 rd Language | 25.2 |
| Sesotho | 24.4 | 4.9 | | |
| siSwati | 1.6 | 0.8 | 4 th Language | 1.6 |
| Xitsonga | 7.1 | 1.6 | | |
| Setswana | 7.1 | 1.6 | No answer | 7.1 |
| Tshivenda | 11.8 | 0 | Total Percentage | 100 |
| isiXhosa | 4.7 | 0.8 | | |
| isiZulu | 10.2 | 10.6 | | |
| OTHER | 3.9 | 2.4 | | |
| Total Percentage | 100 | 100 | | |

Table 4.2 below indicates the ages at which participants started to learn English. (Nine participants did not answer this question.) The largest portion of students (55%) started to learn English between the ages of 5 and 7 years, 11% learned English before entering primary school, and 22% later in their primary schooling. A total of 7.2% of the participants only started learning English in high school.

¹⁶ Most of the participants spoke a Sotho language, but only Sesotho (or Southern Sotho) and Sepedi (or Northern Sotho). According to Alsintl (2013), Western Sotho is the third member of the Sotho language group, but no participant indicated knowledge of this language.

This is assumed to be international students as most of them have French as L1 (5.5% of participants indicated that French is their L1 and another 3.9% that another non-South African language is their L1, as indicated in Table 4.1), and it is a requirement at the VUT that all international students attend at least one compulsory Basic English course before commencing with their degree studies.

Table 4.2: Age at which participants started learning English

| Age of acquisition of English (in years) | Number of participants | Percentage of participants |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2 | 2 | 1.6 |
| 3 | 5 | 3.9 |
| 4 | 8 | 6.3 |
| 5 | 22 | 17.3 |
| 6 | 29 | 22.8 |
| 7 | 19 | 15 |
| 8 | 7 | 5.5 |
| 9 | 6 | 4.7 |
| 10 | 7 | 5.5 |
| 11 | 1 | 0.8 |
| 12 | 3 | 2.4 |
| 14 | 1 | 0.8 |
| 15 | 3 | 2.4 |
| 16 | 1 | 0.8 |
| 19 | 1 | 0.8 |
| 20 | 2 | 1.6 |
| 21 | 1 | 0.8 |
| No answer | 9 | 7.1 |
| Total answers | 118 | 92.9 |
| Total | 127 | 100 |

Table 4.3 indicates the languages that formed part of the participants' NSC, and Table 4.4 indicates the average symbol that the participants reported to have achieved for these languages. These languages are not necessarily captured in terms of their level of study, that is, in terms of whether they were studied as home language (HL), first additional language (FAL), or additional language (AL). Also, the symbols reported by the participants were not verified by me. From Table 4.3, it can be seen that English is listed as a NSC subject by 88% of the participants. The only other languages indicated in high numbers are Afrikaans, with 30% of participants doing it as a matriculation subject, and Sepedi and Sesotho, by 14% and 13% of the participants, respectively.

Table 4.3: Languages done in Matric (for the NSC)

| Language | Percentage of participants who indicated this language subject as | | |
|-------------------|---|-----------|-----------|
| | Subject 1 | Subject 2 | Subject 3 |
| Afrikaans | 3.1 | 22 | 4.7 |
| English | 36.2 | 51.2 | 0.8 |
| French | 4.7 | 0.8 | 0 |
| Ndebele | 0 | 0.8 | 0 |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 12.6 | 0.8 | 0.8 |
| Sesotho | 8.7 | 3.9 | 0 |
| siSwati | 1.6 | 0 | 0 |
| Xitsonga | 3.9 | 0 | 0 |
| Setswana | 3.9 | 2.4 | 0.8 |
| Tshivenda | 7.9 | 1.6 | 0 |
| isiXhosa | 2.4 | 0.8 | 0.8 |
| isiZulu | 5.5 | 1.6 | 0.8 |
| OTHER | 3.1 | 0 | 0 |
| No answer | 6.3 | 14.2 | 91.3 |

It can be assumed that not all the symbol indications given by the participants are a true representation of the standard in South Africa. The reason for this statement is because of the debateable situation of mark adjustments to raise matric pass rates in the past. *City Press* (2011) reported that there were adjustments made to the 2010 matriculants' marks, where some students were claimed to have "generously benefited" from this practice. According to *City Press* (2011), it was the first time since 1918 that these adjustments were made public and that English as a FAL received an upward adjustment of 1% – and these adjustments "definitely affected the general pass rates". In the matric year of 2012, Malgas (2013) explains, some of the biggest challenges were "overly-lenient marking, inability of learners to express themselves in English, poor performance, particularly in maths, and the fact that little effective teaching and learning was taking place". Volmink (2015) listed the following languages, amongst others, as those for which there was an upward shift to the average historical learner performance profile: Afrikaans HL, Afrikaans FAL, English HL, English FAL, isiNdebele HL, isiZulu HL, Sepedi HL, Sepedi FAL, Sesotho HL, Setswana HL, siSwati HL, Tshivenda HL, and Xitsonga HL. As mentioned previously, students participating in this study were mostly 20 to 23 years old at the time of data collection, which means that they could have been affected by this mark adjustment. Therefore, the symbols are not necessarily a true representation of the language ability of the participants.

According to the data that the participants gave on the questionnaire, summarised in Table 4.4, most students received an average of between 70 and 79% for the first language that they listed on the questionnaire. This is not necessarily their L1 or the language which they studied at HL level; this is

merely, chronologically-speaking, the first language that they entered on the questionnaire. The same applies to the second and third languages that they listed. In the second language listed, the average symbol was a B, or Level 6 as is currently used in the schooling system. Only a few participants indicated that they studied a third language as part of their NSC, but most indicated achieving an F symbol, which means that they did not pass that specific subject.

Table 4.4: Average symbols acquired for languages done in Matric (for the NSC)

| Symbol | Percentage of participants who indicated obtaining this symbol for their | | |
|--------------------------------|--|------------------------|-----------------------|
| | first language listed | second language listed | third language listed |
| A Symbol 80 – 100% Level 7 | 14.2 | 8.7 | 1.6 |
| B Symbol: 70 – 79% Level 6 | 39.4 | 30.7 | 1.6 |
| C Symbol: 60 – 69% Level 5 | 26 | 26 | 2.4 |
| D Symbol: 50 – 59% Level 4 | 9.4 | 9.4 | 0.8 |
| E Symbol: 40 – 49% Level 3 | 1.6 | 8.7 | 2.4 |
| F Symbol: 35 – 39% Level 2 | 1.6 | 0.8 | 8.7 |
| FF Symbol: 30 – 34% Level 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| No answer | 7.9 | 15.7 | 91.3 |

Almost 1% of the total participants indicated having had English as a third language (as seen in Table 3.4). Approximately 10% of all participants in this study indicated a failing symbol for third languages on NSC level. Thus it can be safely assumed that about 10% of the 1% of students that come to university with English as a third language, are without sufficient English skills. In the broader picture, it can represent one in every 100 students not being proficient in the LoLT of most institutions in South Africa and the world.

Recall that participants were also asked about the contexts in which they use their languages. I now discuss their usage of their respective languages and also the role that English plays within the tertiary environment in which they find themselves. In Table 4.5, the contexts in which participants used their languages are indicated: at home, during family gatherings, at university, at social gatherings, at work, on social media and during religious gatherings. This summary provides an indication of the

importance that languages and being multilingual play in a multicultural and multilingual environment relevant to students studying at the VUT.

Table 4.5: Percentage of participants indicating languages they use in different contexts

| Language used | Percentage of participants using the language | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|--------------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| | at home | during family gatherings | at university | at social gatherings | at work | on social media | during religious gatherings |
| Afrikaans | 4.7 | 2.4 | 0.8 | 1.6 | 0.8 | 2.4 | 2.4 |
| English | 20.5 | 21.3 | 93.7 | 81.1 | 18.9 | 93.7 | 46.5 |
| French | 6.3 | 7.9 | 1.6 | 3.1 | 0 | 5.5 | 6.3 |
| Ndebele | 1.6 | 3.1 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0 | 0.8 | 0 |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 16.5 | 19.7 | 11 | 5.5 | 0 | 1.6 | 15 |
| Sesotho | 27.6 | 25.2 | 24.4 | 15 | 2.4 | 10.2 | 22.8 |
| siSwati | 0.8 | 2.4 | 1.6 | 0.8 | 0 | 0.8 | 0.8 |
| Xitsonga | 7.9 | 7.9 | 3.9 | 5.5 | 0 | 3.1 | 5.5 |
| Setswana | 7.1 | 5.5 | 7.9 | 1.6 | 0.8 | 2.4 | 3.9 |
| Tshivenda | 7.9 | 9.4 | 6.3 | 3.1 | 0 | 6.3 | 9.4 |
| isiXhosa | 3.9 | 4.7 | 4.7 | 3.9 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 3.9 |
| isiZulu | 11.8 | 16.5 | 20.5 | 15 | 0.8 | 6.3 | 19.7 |
| OTHER | 3.9 | 3.9 | 2.4 | 0.8 | 0 | 0.8 | 2.4 |

The language indicated as being used at home is assumed to be the language used to communicate with the participants' parents/guardians and siblings. There are obviously some participants that indicated more than one language as the language used at home because of parents being from different language groups. In this regard, Barnes (2008:125) states that family bilingualism appears to be a widespread phenomenon in South Africa, but that at that time there was very little research done on it. From Table 4.5, it is clear that the largest number of students speak Sesotho at home, which can be explained by the geographic location of the VUT. Other languages that are also commonly spoken at home are English, Sepedi and isiZulu.

The main languages at family gatherings are, as one might have expected, the same as those mentioned as being spoken at home, but this does not hold true for the languages spoken at university. At university, 93% of the participants speak English, with the only other frequently spoken languages being isiZulu and Sesotho. Again, Sesotho would have been expected, given the geographic location of the VUT.

At social gatherings, at work and on social media, English is by far the most used language, presumably because of the multilingual societies found on those platforms and English being the national lingua

franca. Lastly, the numbers for the languages spoken during religious gatherings – namely English, Sesotho, isiZulu and Sepedi – are similar to those spoken at home and during family gatherings.

In summary, in the situations where families are together (at home, during family gatherings and during religious gatherings), there is a prominent use of English, Sesotho, Zulu and Sepedi, and this is very likely linked to the large number of mother-tongue speakers of those languages who participated in the study (amongst others, due to the geographical area in which the VUT is situated). However, it is interesting to note that in the social situations and at university, English is by far the most used language as it is spoken by 80% or more of the participants.

4.3 English proficiency and patterns of language use of 2015/2016 Applied Communication Skills students at the VUT

Participants were required to fill in a table making use of a scale from 1–5 (1 being very good; 5 being no knowledge) to indicate their proficiency in terms of understanding, speaking, reading and writing their languages. Table 4.6 portrays the English proficiency, but I only report on the indications of Very Good (5) and Good (4). As can be seen in this table, less than 50% of participants indicated that they understood, spoke, read or wrote English very well. Also less than 50% rated their English skills as good. Recall that all of the participants have only English as LoLT at the VUT, yet in total 89% of them understand English well or very well, which means that 11% of them have poor or average listening skills in the language in which all their classes are taught. All their textbooks are also only in English, yet only 93% of them indicated that they can read English well or very well, while 7% of the participants cannot read English well.

Table 4.6: Self-rated English proficiency of participants

| English proficiency | Percentage of participants | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Understand | Speak | Read | Write |
| Very good | 48.8 | 40.9 | 49.6 | 45.7 |
| Good | 40.2 | 48 | 43.3 | 45.7 |

In Table 4.7, participants indicated the languages that they used in primary school and the languages that their teachers used in the classrooms. The last column in this table indicates the official LoLT of those primary schools that the participants attended. Note that participants could list any number of languages when answering these questions. This means that each participant could list all languages – even those that were taken as subjects – as languages used by them in classroom. This was also the

case for the languages that the teachers used. Because the percentages in the LoLT column total more than 100%, it can be assumed that some of their schools were dual-medium. Seventy-two percent of the participants listed English as (one of) the language(s) they and their teachers used at primary school, although only 69% of schools had English as their official LoLT. Afrikaans was the second-most frequently listed language used by participants and their teachers in primary school, but those percentages were higher than the percentage of schools that had Afrikaans as official LoLT. Again, Sesotho and Sepedi featured more strongly than the other indigenous African languages in terms of languages spoken by participants and their teachers at primary schools.

Table 4.7: Languages used by participants and their teachers in primary school and as official LoLT of the primary school

| Language | Percentage of participants indicating | | |
|-------------------|---|--|---|
| | that they used the language at primary school | that their primary school teacher(s) used the language | that this was the official LoLT of their primary school |
| Afrikaans | 17.3 | 14.2 | 12.6 |
| English | 71.7 | 71.7 | 68.5 |
| French | 6.3 | 6.3 | 6.3 |
| Ndebele | 1.6 | 1.6 | 0 |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 10.2 | 7.9 | 5.5 |
| Sesotho | 11.8 | 12.6 | 7.1 |
| siSwati | 0.8 | 1.6 | 0 |
| Xitsonga | 6.3 | 7.1 | 3.9 |
| Setswana | 3.1 | 3.1 | 0.8 |
| Tshivenda | 6.3 | 7.9 | 4.7 |
| isiXhosa | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.6 |
| isiZulu | 5.5 | 6.3 | 3.9 |
| OTHER | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0 |

Most participants and their teachers thus used English in the primary school. The high school table (see Table 4.8) looks similar to the primary school table, but the number of participants and their teachers using English was higher in high school than in primary school. The other languages were used by small numbers of participants and teachers. Of these, Afrikaans, Sesotho and Sepedi were again the most frequently used, although to a far lesser extent than English.

Table 4.8: Languages used by participants and their teachers in high school and as official LoLT of the high school

| Language | Percentage of participants indicating | | |
|-------------------|--|---|--|
| | that they used the language at high school | that their high school teacher(s) used the language | that this was the official LoLT of their high school |
| Afrikaans | 17.3 | 15 | 15 |
| English | 84.3 | 89.8 | 82.7 |
| French | 6.3 | 6.3 | 6.3 |
| Ndebele | 0.8 | 1.6 | 0 |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 6.3 | 3.1 | 2.4 |
| Sesotho | 7.1 | 7.9 | 4.7 |
| siSwati | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0 |
| Xitsonga | 3.1 | 2.4 | 1.6 |
| Setswana | 2.4 | 1.6 | 0.8 |
| Tshivenda | 3.1 | 5.5 | 2.4 |
| isiXhosa | 2.4 | 0.8 | 0.8 |
| isiZulu | 4.7 | 3.9 | 3.1 |
| OTHER | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0 |

The discussion now turns to the language used at university. Table 4.9 indicates that most students use English when working in groups in class (85%) as well as outside of the classroom (77%), and that, for most of them, this is the language they would prefer to use during group work (84%). The other languages are used to far lesser extents. Sesotho is the second-most frequently used, followed by isiZulu and Sepedi. Note, however, that more participants currently use these three languages during group work than those who would prefer to use these languages. The reasons why specific languages are used during group work were not investigated; it could be that some students use languages other than English to accommodate group members with lower English proficiency but would prefer not to have to do so. (This point will be discussed in the next chapter, when the interview results obtained from the Limpopo students will be considered.)

Table 4.9: Languages used and preferred by participants during group work

| Language | Percentage of participants indicating | | |
|-------------------|---|---|--|
| | that they use the language during group work in class | that they use the language during group work out of class | that they would prefer to use the language during group work |
| Afrikaans | 3.1 | 0.8 | 1.6 |
| English | 85 | 77.2 | 84.3 |
| French | 2.4 | 1.6 | 2.4 |
| Ndebele | 0 | 1.6 | 0.8 |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 8.7 | 9.4 | 4.7 |
| Sesotho | 15 | 18.9 | 4.7 |
| siSwati | 0.8 | 0 | 0 |
| Xitsonga | 4.7 | 3.1 | 4.7 |
| Setswana | 2.4 | 2.4 | 0 |
| Tshivenda | 3.9 | 3.1 | 2.4 |
| isiXhosa | 2.4 | 4.7 | 3.1 |
| isiZulu | 9.4 | 15 | 4.7 |
| OTHER | 0 | 0 | 0 |

When asked whether they found it valuable to know more than one language, 93.7% of the participants answered “yes”. They were asked to provide reasons for their answers, some of which are given below. (All written participant responses were copied verbatim, without correcting any spelling, punctuation or other errors. I did not provide any examples from the participants from Limpopo, as they will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.) The general reason given for why it is beneficial to be multilingual was that it allows one to break through language barriers, allowing for comfortable communication not just for oneself but also for others by way of accommodating them. There were also some participants who considered being multilingual an interesting way to get to know other cultures. Others mentioned that knowing other languages is useful in the workplace or when travelling. Some participants also stated that multilingualism improves learning and thinking, and that they strive to become more multilingual. Consider the following selection of participant answers:

#17 so that you can communicate with other people from different cultures and tribes without any communication barrier.

#22 Because I think it is interesting learning other people’s languages and some people, especially the elderly people cannot speak English.

#91 because you can get along with many people really well and you can understand them better if they express themselves in their own home language.

#13 *because you might visit new places with different culture and language, knowing their language will facilitate communication.*

#69 *so that I could reach my dream of becoming a multi-language writer, and present for a show so that audience can talk with any language.*

#86 *languages have their own story, culture and colour by knowing other languages we are being open to the world.*

#98 *... so that it is easy to have a chat with anyone everywhere and gain knowledge.*

Some participants agreed that it is beneficial to be multilingual, but felt that even in a multilingual country, English is the best way to cross language barriers:

#23 *It is very important, because you get to communicate with different people every-day, but I believe English can compromise any language barrier.*

#43 *It becomes easier to communicate with the people who speak languages different from yours and have a different understanding level of the English language which is used most often.*

Only one participant (Participant #33) was of the opinion that it is not beneficial to be multilingual, because English as lingua franca negates the need for multilingualism. Another participant felt it is both beneficial and not beneficial to be bilingual (Participant #12). Their reasons were as follows:

#33 *on my side it is not valuable because we can all speak in English if there's any communication needed.*

#12 *It is good to know more languages in order to understand other in their language. I however feel that English is the best language to use as most understand it internationally.*

The last question of the questionnaire asked the participants if they found it difficult to use different languages at different times at university. The result was that 36% of the participants answered “yes” and 53% “no”. Six participants did not answer the question, and 3.1% indicated “sometimes” or “maybe”. Many participants said that it was easy to switch between languages as they were used to doing so or that they know enough languages to do so comfortably. Such code switching was sometimes seen as fun. Consider the following participants’ reasons for saying that switching between languages on campus is not difficult:

#41 I don't have any difficulty in doing so because I grew up in a vast language speaking society.

#68 as I grew up switching languages as a child it has become easier to get used to it at university.

#101 it is something I've gotten used to doing since primary school.

#36 Since my English has gotten better and the most of the time I am around people from my home country who speak languages that I have mastered, switching between is not a big deal.

#29 I find it interesting and fun, shows how much I know of my languages.

Many who found it difficult to switch between languages stated that the main reason is that they do not necessarily understand the other languages that well or are not totally familiar with certain words in some of the other languages:

#43 I can only speak two languages fairly well, so it is an inconvenience at times. Hence I prefer using either English with a bit of the others, or just siSwati only.

#91 because in KZN, Newcastle we use IsiZulu language for almost everything but when you get to Gauteng you become surprise to hear different languages.

#58 It becomes difficult to pronounce certain words because I am used to speaking my home language more than other languages.

#74 some words are confusing as they mean two totally different things in different languages.

4.4 Language portraits of 2015/2016 Applied Communication Skills students at the VUT

Recall that participants had to list all languages represented in their language portrait, regardless of how good or poor the participant could speak these languages, and to indicate their proficiency in each language represented. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate next to the language their proficiency by writing a number, where 1 = Mother tongue, 2 = Speak well & understand well, 3 = Speak a little & understand well, and 4 = Speak a little & understand a little (see Appendix B). Very few participants, however, followed this instruction, making it difficult to distinguish between the knowledge that each participant has in any given language. For this reason, no attempt was made to calculate average proficiency levels. Rather, only the number of languages represented on participants' languages portraits is reported below.

Based on their language portraits, participants on average knew 4.4 languages, indicating the multilingualism of the average VUT student (see Table 4.10). There were no monolingual participants. Ten percent of the participants were bilingual, and 90% were multilingual. Twenty-one percent knew three languages, and 40% knew more than four. Two of the participants indicated each knowing 10 languages.

Table 4.10: Number of languages indicated on language portraits

| Number of languages known | Number of participants | Percentage of participants |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2 | 12 | 9.5 |
| 3 | 26 | 20.6 |
| 4 | 38 | 30.2 |
| 5 | 19 | 15.1 |
| 6 | 14 | 11.1 |
| 7 | 10 | 7.9 |
| 8 | 4 | 3.2 |
| 9 | 1 | 0.8 |
| 10 | 2 | 1.6 |
| Average | 4.4 languages per participant | |

There were seven participants who wrote on their language portraits that they knew eight or more languages, but only five of these actually coloured in their language portraits. One of these five was from Limpopo and will be discussed later as part of the Limpopo sample. The other four language portraits will be shown and briefly discussed here, to provide an indication of the most multilingual participants.

Participant #21 indicated that their mother tongue, isiXhosa, is in their head (see Figure 4.1). One of their arms is Afrikaans, which they speak and understand well, and the other arm is English, which they also speak and understand well. Sesotho, which makes up the torso, is spoken a little and understood well. One leg is siSwati which, like Sesotho, is spoken a little but understood well, and the other leg is isiZulu, which the participant speaks and understands well. Xitsonga and Tshivenda, indicated on one foot each, are both indicated as “speak and understand a little”.

For Participant #37, Sesotho, the home language, makes up the main parts of the grey outfit (see Figure 4.2). English is the bright red skin, which covers the second largest part of the portrait. IsiZulu is indicated as pink hair, Tshivenda as a dark grey handbag, Xitsonga as the purple boots, Sepedi as a mask covering the upper part of the face, and Afrikaans as the shoulder straps of the dress. Setswana and isiXhosa were assigned the same dark red colour, and this colour was used for the lower part of the face and for the belt. Participant #37 indicated Spanish as blue finger tips, which might indicate that this person is only “dipping their fingers” into the language.

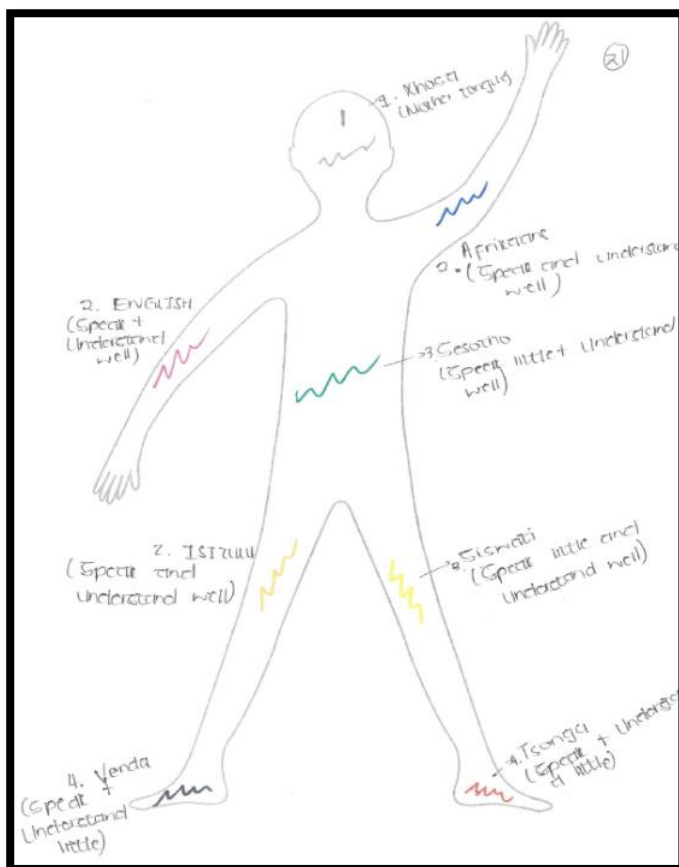


Figure 4.1: Language portrait of multilingual participant #21



Figure 4.2: Language portrait of multilingual participant #37

In Figure 4.3, participant #57 indicated Sesotho as a red leg, English as a brown arm, isiZulu as a blue leg, Sepedi as a green torso, Afrikaans as a purple belt, siSwati grey shoulders, and Setswana a light green arm. French is indicated as a black head.

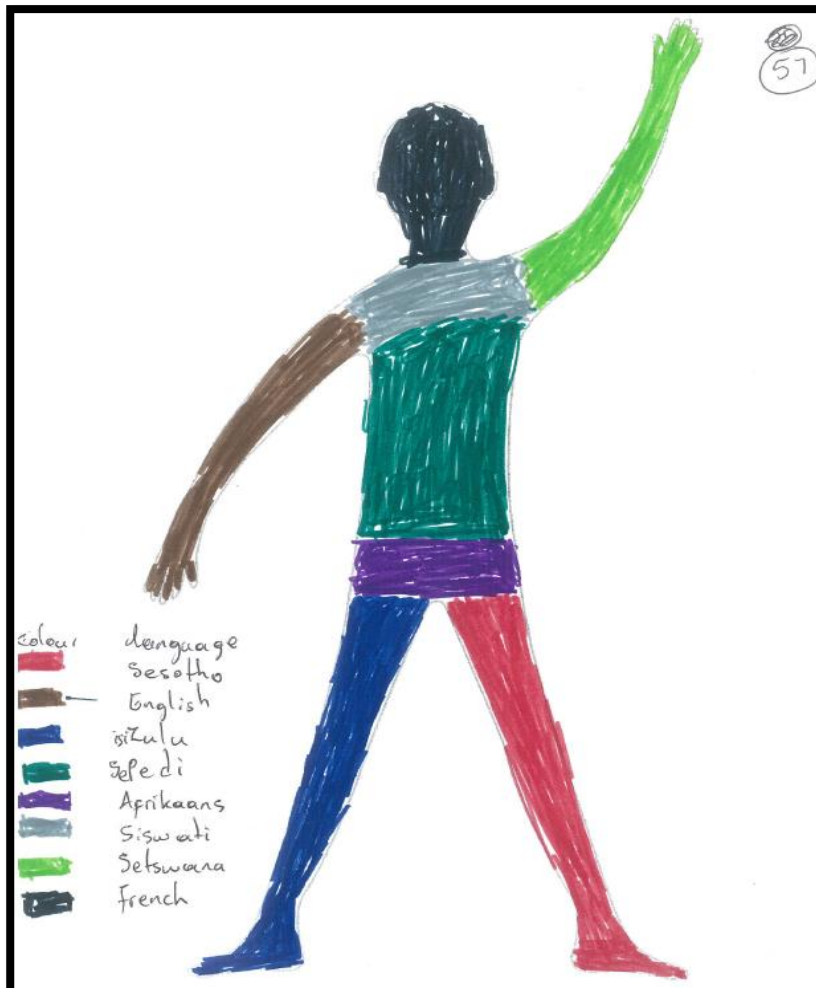


Figure 4.3: Language portrait of multilingual participant #57

Participant #115 indicated Sesotho as a red heart (see Figure 4.4). Languages written over the body include Setswana, isiXhosa, Tsonga and Tshivenda in red; isiZulu in green; and English, Afrikaans and Sepedi in brown. Sesotho, English and isiZulu in brown, green and blue, respectively, are written in a speech bubble coming from the mouth. A brain was drawn in red (the same red in which certain language names were written on the body).

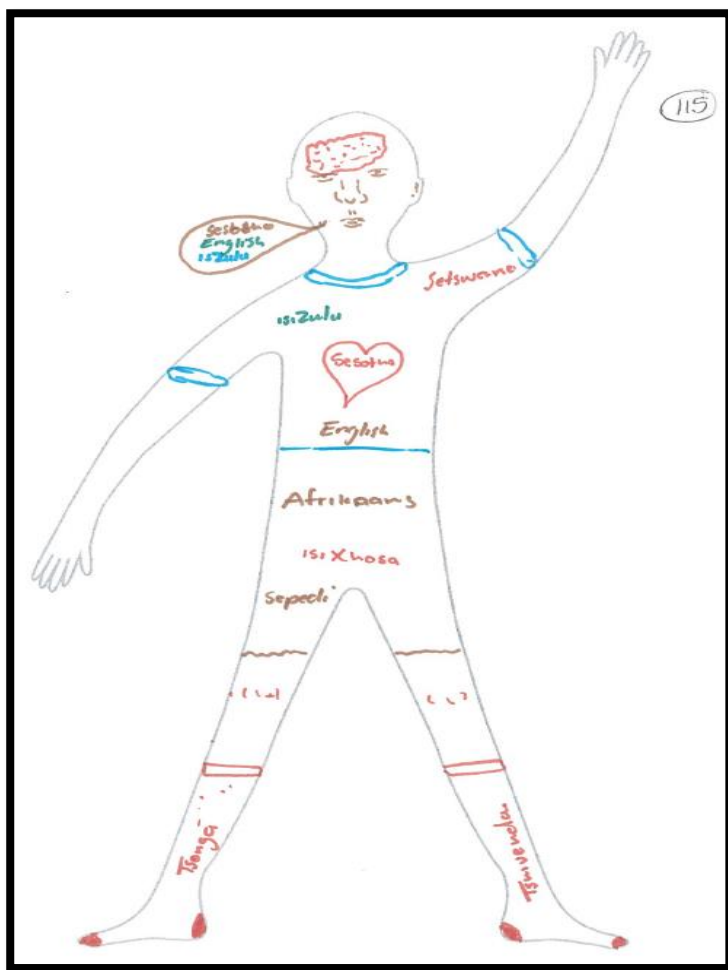


Figure 4.4: Language portrait of multilingual participant #115

4.5 Summary of all participants' language profiles

In summary, upon examining the data collected, it can be seen that the students participating in this study were diverse in terms of knowledge of and schooling in different languages. The first research question of this study was “What is the language profile of the 2015 and 2016 contingents of Applied Communication Skills 2 students at the VUT?” It can be concluded that the profile is very diverse, with only 10% being bilingual and the remaining 90% being able to converse in three or more languages. Participants were able to communicate in four to five languages on average. English was clearly the most frequently used language in social situations and at university, with other languages featuring frequently in any family-related situation. These findings concur with the statement by Alexander (2004:121) that the majority of the mother-tongue speakers of African languages believe that their languages should not be used for higher-order functions but instead should be preserved and maintained in the spheres of family, community and church.

English played a prominent role in education: even at primary school, English was the language used by the vast majority of participants and their teachers, and most participants attended primary schools of which the official LoLT was English. A similar pattern was observed for high school education, with the numbers for English rising somewhat from primary school to high school. At university, there was a clear preference to use English in group-work situations. This concurs, to a certain extent, with the results of Vosloo (2009:48), namely that 75% of VUT students preferred being taught in English. Although all lectures are presented in English only and all textbooks are in English, only 89% of the participants rated their comprehension of English as good or very good, meaning that 11% cannot comfortably and confidently use English. It is, however, important to note that even with the preference for and high usage of English, participants are of the opinion that it is valuable to know more than one language.

Chapter 5: Language profile of Limpopo participants

5.1 Purpose of this chapter

In this chapter, I discuss the questionnaire data of the 36 participants who indicated that they grew up and still live in the Limpopo province. (Reasons for singling out participants from specifically this province were stated in sections 1.2.3 and 3.2.) The focus will be on the languages that these participants speak and the role that English plays within their language repertoires. Eight of these students agreed to individual interviews. The interview data is used in this chapter, together with the written responses of all Limpopo participants, to illustrate the results obtained. (In the next chapter, I will consider the language-related marks obtained by only the eight interviewed participants, but in the current chapter, I discuss the group of students from Limpopo as a whole, whether interviewed or not.) In addition to the questionnaire, each of the 36 participants completed a language portrait. Originally, the intention was to discuss each Limpopo participant's portrait with him/her, but the uptake of the interview was so low that this instrument could not be used as intended. I do include several portraits in this chapter, merely to illustrate the nature of the multilingualism present amongst the Limpopo participants.

5.2 Some demographics of the Limpopo participants

This section provides a summary of the Limpopo participants' demographics. As stated above, the sample of participants discussed in this section consisted of all participants who indicated the province in which they grew up as being Limpopo. The Limpopo group consisted of 36 students,¹⁷ which constitutes 28% of the total group of 127 participants. Of the Limpopo students, 42% were female and 58% male. The three oldest participants in this study were part of the Limpopo group. Thirty percent of the Limpopo group were born in 1994, 20% in 1995 and another 20% in 1996. This means that 70% of the Limpopo participants were "born-frees", a name given to those born in or after 1994, the year of South Africa's first democratic elections (Southafrica.info 2016). This might be relevant in the sense that, according to Southafrica.info (2016), the general perception is that born-frees can be and do whatever they want because their future is in their hands, whereas the previous "generation knew about career choices available to them, but had limited resources to enable them to go after their dreams" (Southafrica.info 2016). This freedom of choice is well-represented in the choice of courses of the

¹⁷ In section 3.2, I stated that 22 Limpopo students were invited to interviews. These 22 are those of the 36 Limpopo students who agreed in principle to being interviewed, but there were another 14 Limpopo students who indicated on their consent forms that they were not interested in being contacted by me regarding a follow-up interview.

Limpopo group: an equal number of participants were enrolled for Biotechnology; Chemical, Civil, Electrical, Mechanical and Metallurgical Engineering; Information Technology; and Photography.

5.3 Languages of the Limpopo participants

As expected, there was a limited number of languages indicated by the participants as their L1s and L2s. Whereas the 127 participants as a whole listed at least 13 languages spoken as L1s and L2s, the Limpopo participants listed six, but two of these six languages were only spoken as L2s. As can be seen in Table 5.1, almost 45% indicated that they were Sepedi L1 speakers (compared to 17% of the participants as a whole), 33% Tshivenda L1 speakers (compared to 12%), and 19% Xitsonga L1 speakers (compared to 12%).

Table 5.1: Languages indicated by Limpopo participants as their L1 and L2

| Language | Percentage of participants | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | speaking the language as L1 | speaking the language as L2 |
| Afrikaans | 0 | 2.8 |
| English | 2.8 | 75 |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 44.4 | 5.6 |
| Sesotho | 0 | 2.8 |
| Xitsonga | 19.4 | 5.6 |
| Tshivenda | 33.3 | 0 |
| No answer | 0 | 8.3 |
| Total Percentage | 100 | 100 |

From the questionnaire data summarised in Table 5.1, it is clear that the Limpopo participants are multilingual, and this was also a theme that emerged from the interviews. Below, I provide some representative interview responses to indicate the extent of these participants' multilingualism.

#48 “... so I was speaking Tsonga outside, at home I was speaking Sotho, when I go to school it was English ... Then after my parents, they moved this side, Gauteng, where I started speaking Zulu ... and Xhosa”

#59 “...but my parents, my mom is, uh, Pedi, my dad is Tsonga ...” [Interviewer: “We’ve got Tsonga and English and Sotho, Sepedi, Xhosa, Zulu, Swati.”] “Yes”

#75 “Uh, in my household we speak Sepedi ... I learned English, like I sort of strayed away from my home language ... mostly my parents [speak Sepedi] ... Among my siblings it’s just English. ...

English [proficiency], ja, it's good. Afrikaans, good. Uh, Sepedi, fair. Uh, my Zulu, it's fair 'cause I was only forced to learn it like, last year ... Swati"

Their multilingualism was also apparent from their language portraits. Table 5.2 provides an indication of the number of languages that the Limpopo participants indicated on their language portraits, regardless of how proficient they were in these languages. Unlike the larger sample where the highest number of languages indicated was 10 (with almost 6% indicating eight to 10 languages), the highest number amongst the Limpopo participants was eight. The average for the Limpopo participants was, however, still 4.2 languages per participant (which is comparable to the 4.4 for the sample as a whole). In the larger sample, 10% of the participants indicated that they were bilingual, and a quarter of those bilinguals were from the Limpopo group. Bilinguals made up 8% of the Limpopo participants.

Table 5.2: Number of languages indicated on the Limpopo participants' language portraits

| Number of languages known | Participants | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Number of Limpopo participants | Percentage of Limpopo participants |
| 2 | 3 | 8.3 |
| 3 | 9 | 25.0 |
| 4 | 13 | 36.1 |
| 5 | 3 | 8.3 |
| 6 | 5 | 13.9 |
| 7 | 2 | 5.6 |
| 8 | 1 | 2.8 |
| 9 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 10 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Average | 4.2 languages per participant | |

Examples of these language portraits are given below. Those of all three of the bilingual Limpopo participants are included in order to provide an indication of the smaller group of students at the VUT who are bilingual. As one can expect from students attending a university with English as sole official LoLT, each of these bilingual participants indicated that English was one of their two languages. Seven other portraits, all from multilinguals, are also included. As stated in Chapter 4, the instructions were that the participants had to indicate next to each language their proficiency in that language, but there was only one Limpopo participant who followed the instruction. This participant's language portrait has also been included here.

Participant #117 has English indicated as different sections of purple clothing (see Figure 5.1). Tshivenda is indicated as red clothing and facial features. Both languages are abbreviated on the chest of the purple vest, as “Ven” and “Eng”.

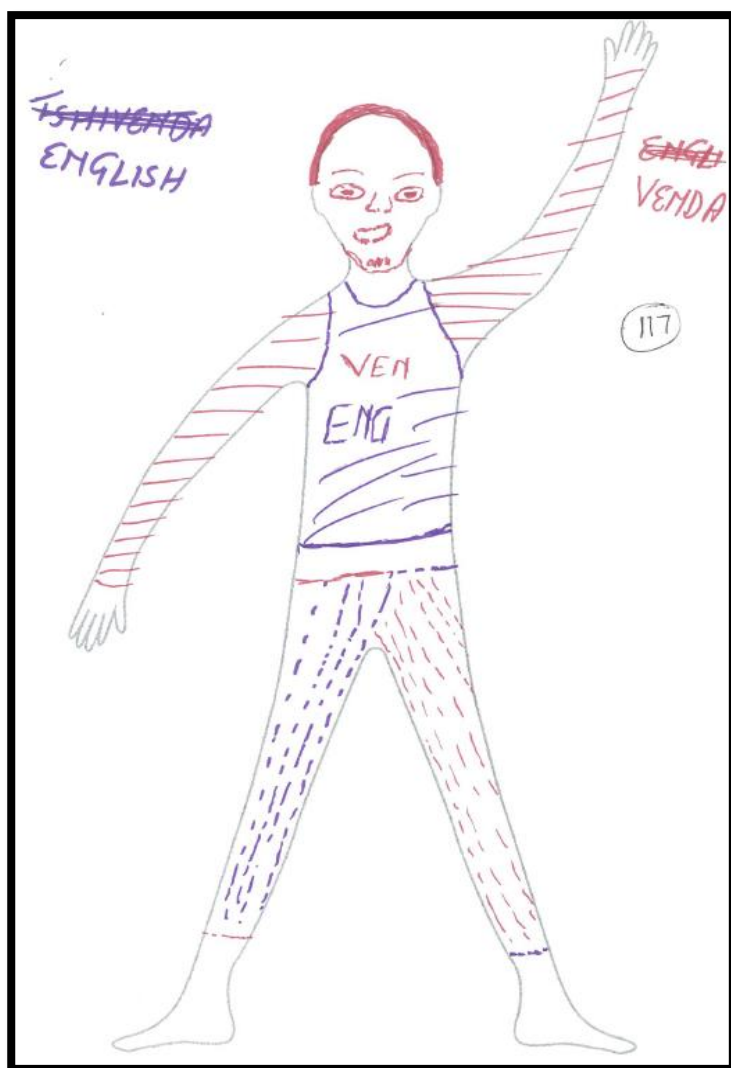


Figure 5.1: Language portrait of bilingual participant #117

As shown in Figure 5.2 overleaf, Participant #122 indicated English as the red top half of the drawing. Sepedi comprised the light green bottom half of the drawing.

Participant #124 represented English as red stripes over the drawing, including the face but excluding the arms. Tshivenda is the orange stripes across the arms and the orange features of the face. The heart is in red, which is the colour representing English. (See Figure 5.3 overleaf.)

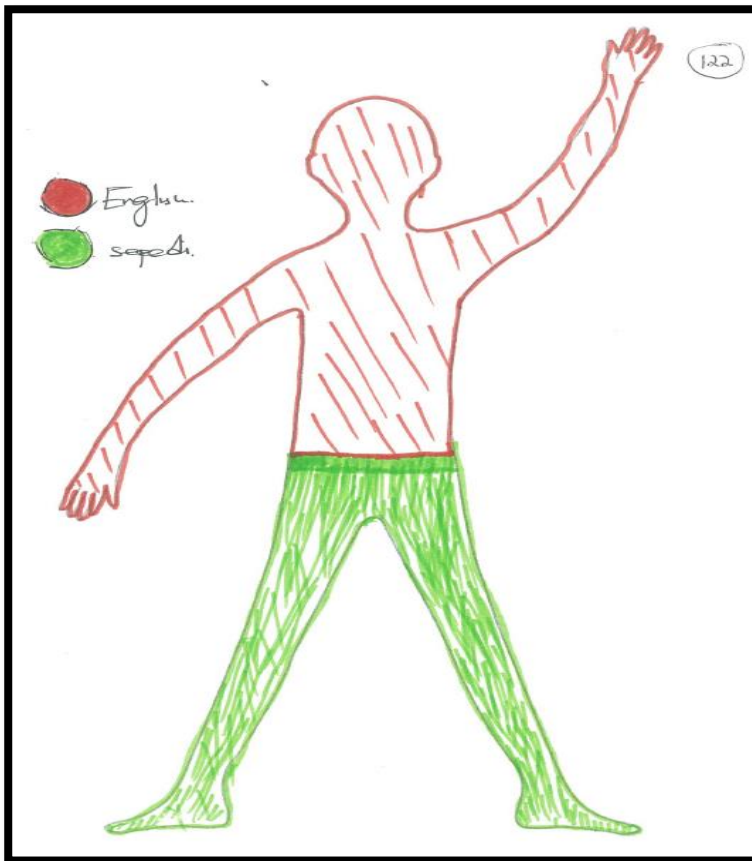


Figure 5.2: Language portrait of bilingual participant #122

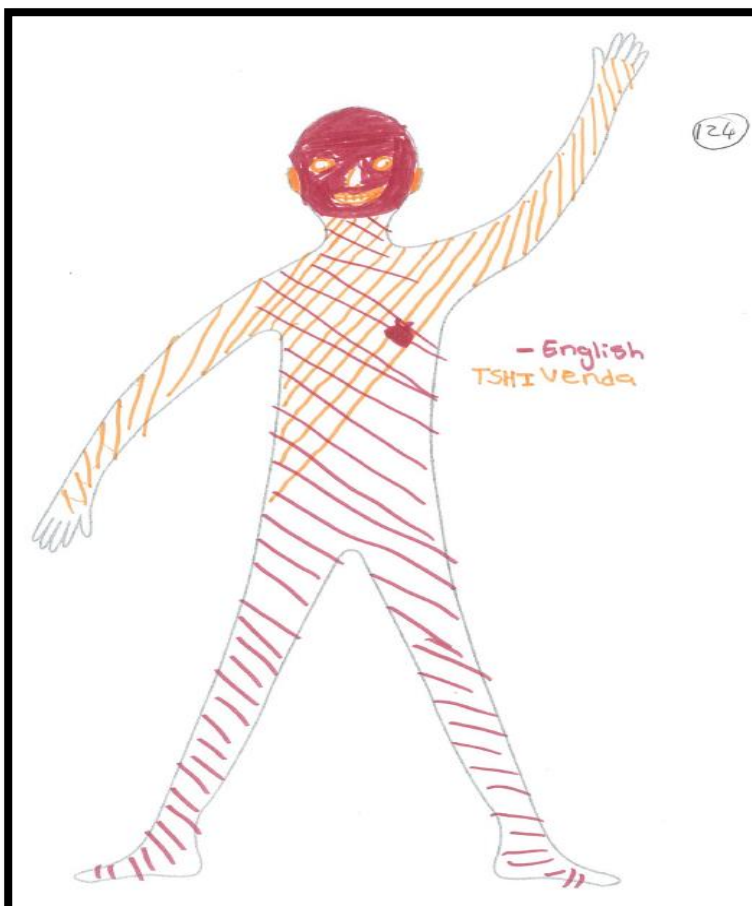


Figure 5.3: Language portrait of bilingual participant #124

Participant #10, the first multilingual Limpopo participant whose portrait is presented here (in Figure 5.4), indicated three languages: Sepedi is the top half of the body coloured in orange; English makes out the bottom half coloured in yellow along with the facial features; the body is outlined with light blue for isiZulu.

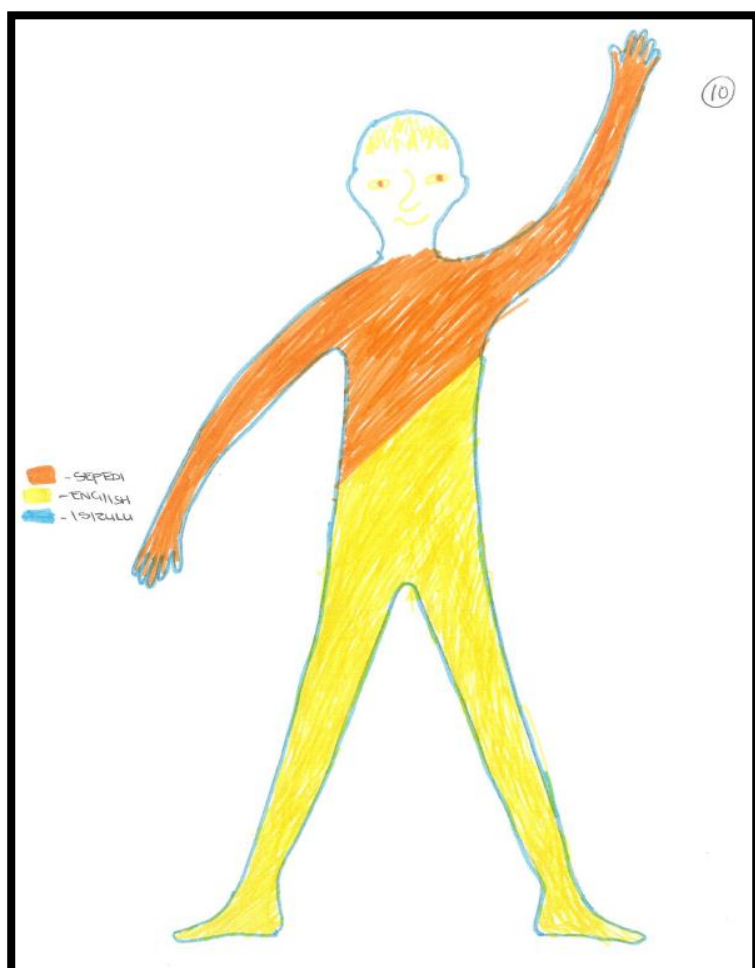


Figure 5.4: Language portrait of multilingual participant #10

Participant #34's drawing has a pink torso and pink facial features indicating Tshivenda, the participant's home language. Light green arms symbolise Sepedi, and English is represented by the brown legs of the drawing. (See Figure 5.5 overleaf.)

Participant #50 listed four languages (see Figure 5.6 overleaf): Sepedi, which is the participant's mother tongue, is represented by the blue shoes; Purple Sesotho is indicated as "speak well & understand well" but is not drawn on the portrait; English is the green belt and, like Sesotho, is indicated as "speak well & understand well"; isiZulu is listed as brown and as "speak a little & understand well" but does not appear on the portrait itself.

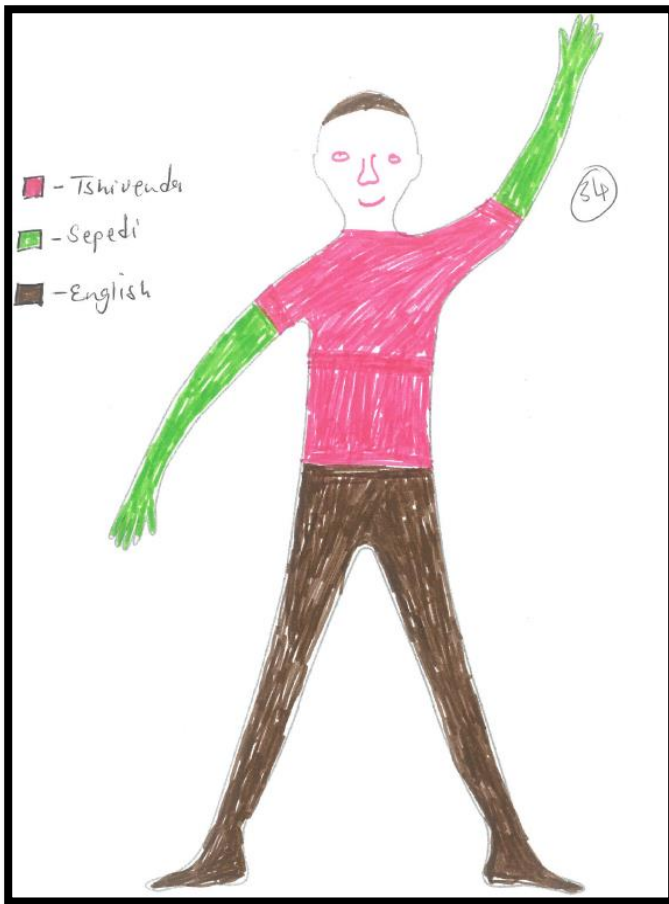


Figure 5.5: Language portrait of multilingual participant #34

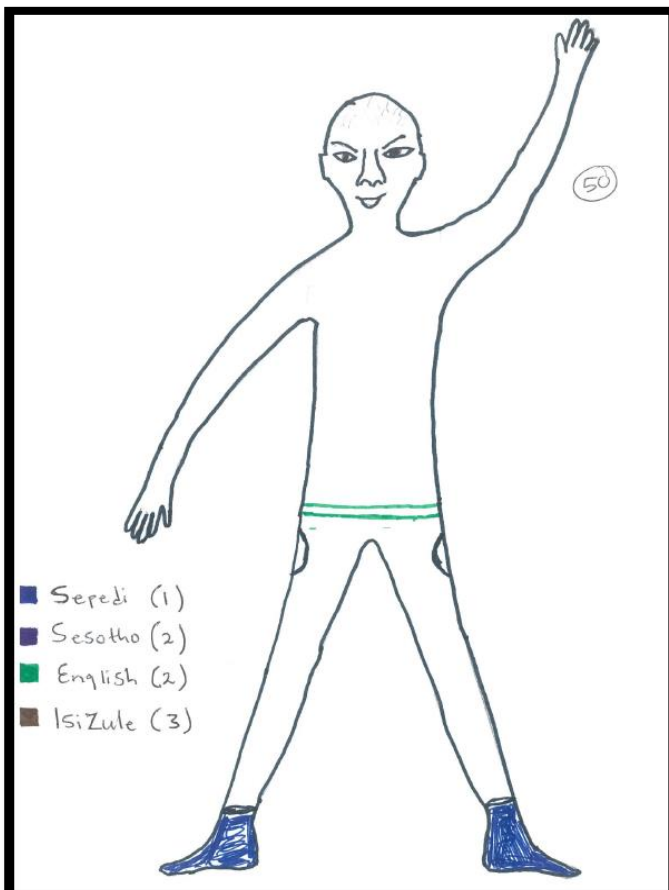


Figure 5.6: Language portrait of multilingual participant #50

As shown in Figure 5.7, Participant #55 indicated Sepedi as the green head, and this was also the participant's mother tongue. English is represented by the orange arms, and Xitsonga the blue torso. One leg is red for isiZulu and the other is brown, indicated as Ndebele.

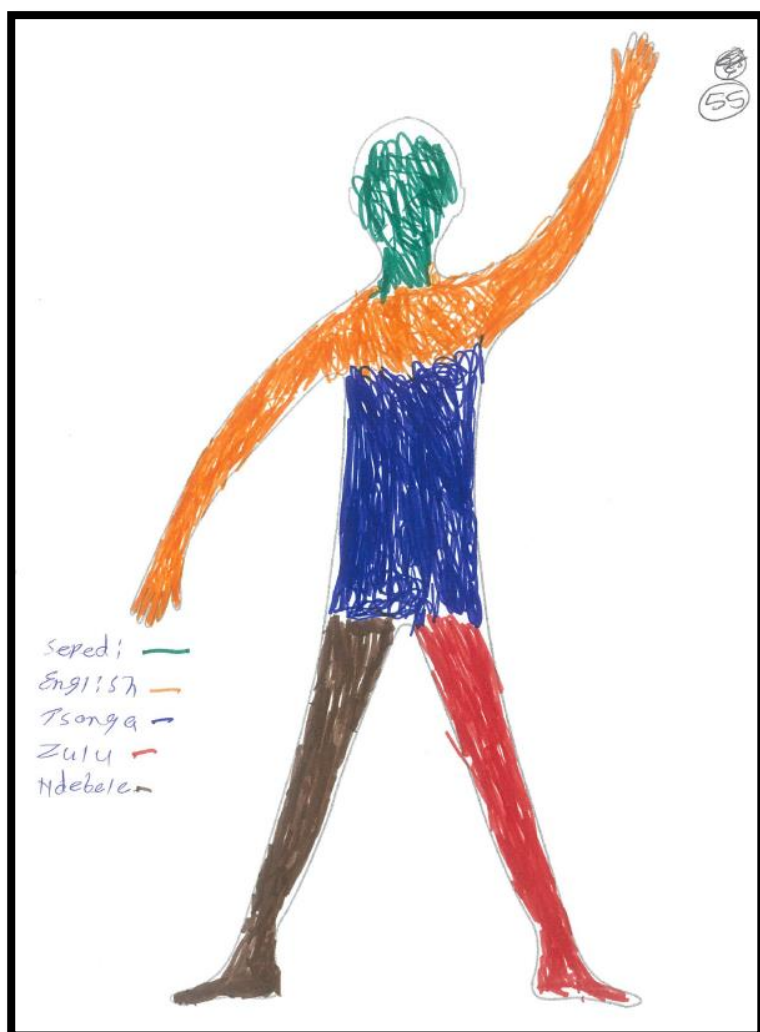


Figure 5.7: Language portrait of multilingual participant #55

Participant #9 indicated Sepedi as a green leg, English is a yellow leg, Setswana as the orange coloured torso, Sesotho as the blue chest and arm, isiZulu is represented by a red arm, and Afrikaans as the light green head. (See Figure 5.8 overleaf.)

Participant #75 portrayed English as the yellow top part of the body and Sepedi as the lower part of the portrait (see Figure 5.9 overleaf). There are small indications of siSwati, Sesotho, isiZulu and Afrikaans on the waist area.



Figure 5.8: Language portrait of multilingual participant #9

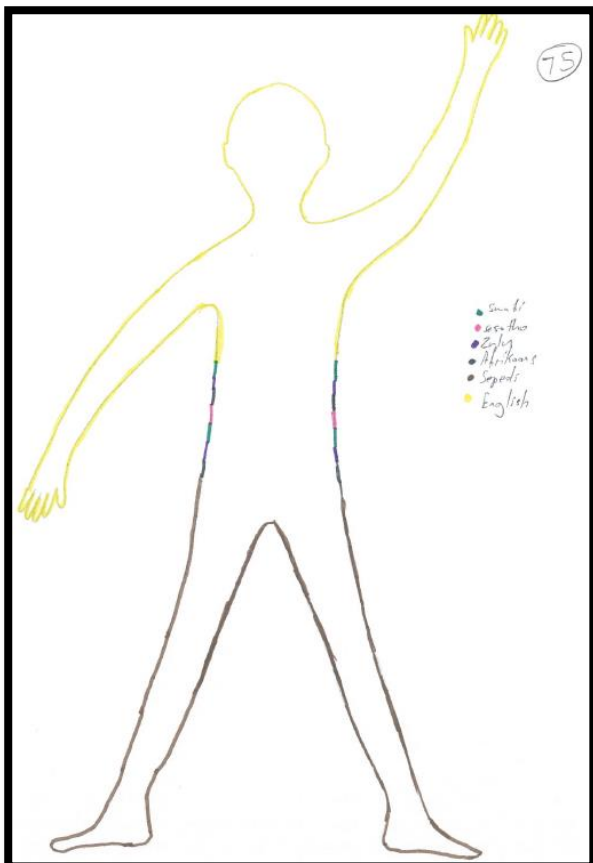


Figure 5.9: Language portrait of multilingual participant #75

Participant #59 indicated Tsonga as the green head, arms and upper part of the torso. English is the lower part of the torso, Sesotho is a red thigh, Sepedi the pink groin area, isiXhosa a blue foot, isiZulu an orange leg, and siSwati a grey lower leg (see Figure 5.10).

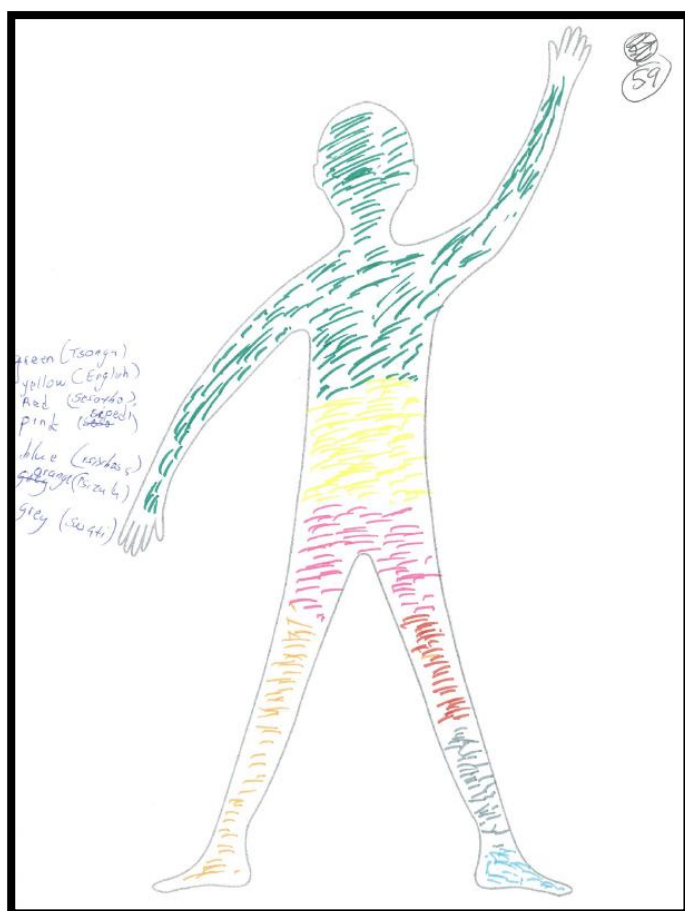


Figure 5.10: Language portrait of multilingual participant #59

Participant #48 presents English as brown shoes and facial features, Xitsonga as a light green shirt, and isiZulu as a pink pendant. Sepedi is indicated as red pants, Setswana are two blue gloves, siSwati is represented as a decorative border on the gloves and Tshivenda is drawn as a purple belt. (See Figure 5.11 overleaf.)

Participant #94, whose language portrait is the last one shown here, depicted eight very colourful languages (see Figure 5.12 overleaf). Xitsonga is represented by the purple eyes and skirt base, with English as a light green shirt. French is a thin red belt and mouth. isiZulu is drawn as light blue hair and small circles on the purple Xitsonga skirt. Afrikaans consists of thin lines on the pink Tshivenda boots, along with dark blue Sesotho lines. siSwati is light pink and is depicted as a few lines on the light green English shirt. English is also drawn as two green earrings and Tshivenda as the pink nose.

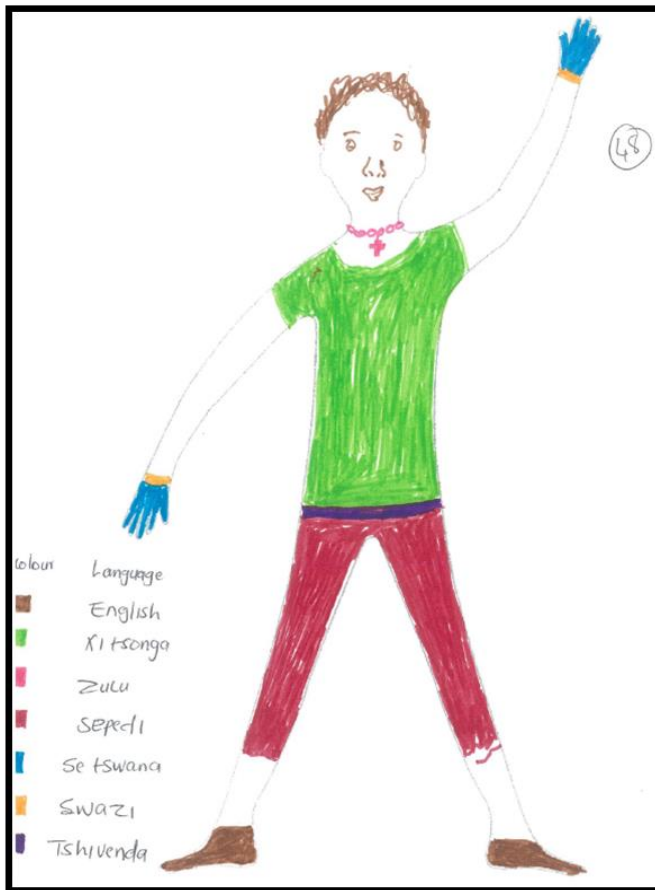


Figure 5.11: Language portrait of multilingual participant #48



Figure 5.12: Language portrait of multilingual participant #94

In the questionnaires, as indicated in Table 5.1 above, 75% of the Limpopo participants indicated that English was their L2 (compared to 65% of the participants as a whole), but (though not a big difference) in Table 5.2 only 72% of the Limpopo participants indicated English being their L2. Despite the relevance of English in tertiary education in general and at the VUT in particular, 20% indicated English as their third language.

When asked about the position that English has within their language repertoires, three Limpopo participants provided no answer. Of the remaining participants, 34% spoke English as L2 and 19% as third language (compared to 61% and 25% of the participants as a whole). The answers provided to this question on the questionnaires pattern for the Limpopo group like it did for the participants as a whole, with the exception that no Limpopo participant spoke English as L1 (whereas 6% of all participants spoke English as L1).

From the answers received from the interviewed participants, it seems like the Limpopo group first learnt English upon or sometime after school entry. Many (but not the majority) stated that they were 5 to 7 years old, which was a pattern similar to that observed for the participants as a whole. From the interview responses, it became clear that “learning English” was not interpreted as “first significant exposure to English” by all participants: one participant indicated that he was 12 years old when he started learning English. As he had lived in Limpopo all his life and had English as a compulsory subject from early on in primary school, his first significant exposure to English was unlikely to have occurred at age 12. According to Participant #55, English was used at his school, but he still stated that he only started using English late in his life: *“I was twenty... one”*. This indicates that being exposed to English and learning English (where learning English is equated with deciding to actively learn English) was not necessarily synonymous for the participants.

Table 5.2 overleaf indicates how many of the Limpopo participants used a collection of particular languages in specific contexts in their everyday life. Those languages that were not mentioned were obviously removed.

Whereas Sesotho was the language spoken by most of the participants as a whole (28%), Sepedi (at 38%) is the language most commonly spoken at home by the Limpopo participants. Sepedi was also their most commonly used language at family gatherings (for the participants as a whole, this was Sesotho). The diversity of languages indicated by the Limpopo participants for religious gatherings proves that these participants are multilingual, with 38% indicating that they use English either as the main form of communication, on its own or with another language, in this context.

Table 5.2: Percentage of Limpopo participants indicating languages they use in different contexts

| Language used | Percentage of participants using the language | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|--------------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| | at home | during family gatherings | at university | at social gatherings | at work | on social media | during religious gatherings |
| English | 12.5 | | 100 | 75 | 12.5 | 100 | 37.5 |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 37.5 | 87.5 | 12.5 | | | | 37.5 |
| Tsonga | 25 | | | | | | 12.5 |
| Tshivenda | 25 | 25 | 12.5 | | | 12.5 | 25 |

When considering the university environment, all Limpopo participants made use of English on campus, with 25% of students indicating that they also used Sepedi and Venda. Social gatherings had a 75% usage of English, with a few students not answering the question. It is not surprising that 100% of the participants used English on social media. This is possibly because of the multilingualism present in this context and to accommodate “friends” and “followers” with a large variety of mother tongues on social media.

5.4 Language proficiency and patterns of language use of Limpopo participants

The participants were asked to indicate how well they understood, spoke, read and wrote all of the official languages in South Africa. The data received from the Limpopo participants for English is presented in Table 5.3. Most rated their English proficiency as good or very good (92% combined, which was similar to the 89% amongst the participants as a whole). One participant rated his/her comprehension of English as “fair / OK” and another as “no knowledge”, this despite receiving all their lecture content through the medium of English.

Table 5.3: Self-rated English proficiency of Limpopo participants

| English proficiency | Percentage of participants | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|-------|------|-------|
| | Understand | Speak | Read | Write |
| Very good | 38.9 | 36.1 | 47.2 | 47.2 |
| Good | 52.8 | 58.3 | 47.2 | 50 |
| Fair / OK | 2.8 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 2.8 |
| Poor / Not good at all | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| No knowledge | 2.8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| No answer | 2.8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

In the interviews, participants were asked about their English proficiency. Although the correlation between their English written work and their perceived English proficiency was inconsistent, as will

be discussed in Chapter 7, their overall perception of their English proficiency ranged from it being adequate to it being excellent, as can be seen from the following responses:

#117 *“Hmmm, I can say that now I’m average in English ... I’m that good, good, good, but then, I’m average, I’m striving to perfection right now ...”*

#59 *“... if I can rate it in percentage, I can say, uh, sixty percent? Yes.”*

#48 *“It’s not that great, good ... it’s good, but, uh, not that perfect.”*

#34 *“Well, I can’t say that it’s good ... I’m still learning, you know ... Learning is a permanent change in behaviour ... I know that there are some words that I still don’t know ... I can say that it’s good but then, it’s not perfect ...”*

#75 *“My English is perfect ... Reading, writing ... speaking, spelling, and so on, anything.”*

The data on English in Table 5.3 can be compared to that in Table 5.4 on Sepedi. Sepedi was chosen for comparative purposes because it was the language that most Limpopo participants indicated as their L1 (see Table 5.1). Thirty-nine percent of the Limpopo participants stated that they could read and write Sepedi well, whereas the other 61% rated their writing proficiency in Sepedi as being average, poor or non-existent. This could create challenges should they want to continue their academic careers in Sepedi. This raises the question as to whether one would be able to identify a suitable African language for use as LoLT at a South African university: if a fairly homogenous group of students from one geographical area indicates that they have limited proficiency in reading and writing a dominant African language in their geographical area, then it might be difficult for them to study in that language at tertiary level.

Table 5.4: Self-rated Sepedi proficiency of Limpopo participants

| Sepedi proficiency | Percentage of participants | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|-------|------|-------|
| | Understand | Speak | Read | Write |
| Very good | 47.2 | 47.2 | 38.9 | 38.9 |
| Good | 13.9 | 11.1 | 2.8 | 0 |
| Fair / OK | 22.2 | 16.7 | 22.2 | 19.4 |
| Poor / Not good at all | 0 | 8.3 | 16.7 | 22.2 |
| No knowledge | 13.9 | 16.7 | 19.4 | 19.4 |
| No answer | 2.8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

In Table 5.5, the languages used at primary school are indicated. Participants could give more than one language as an answer, so this table is an indication of all the languages the participants used, regardless

of whether or not these languages were the official LoLTs. English was indicated as being used by 72% of the participants at primary school level, and Sepedi by the second largest percentage, namely by 25%. Sixty-seven percent indicated that their primary school teachers used English, although 72% indicated that English was the official LoLT of their primary schools (so the figures for English were very similar to those for the participants as a whole). The reason for this discrepancy could be the practice of frequent code switching for the purposes of comprehension and clarification. The reason for this statement is because of answers like the following given by the interview participants in response to the question “Do you think that teachers think code switching is the better way to teach?”:

#34 *“they switched ... it was only depending on how the person is understanding, or when he or she asked the question.”*

#48 *“they saw that we never got it, then they will switch into Tsonga so that we can get what they’re saying.”*

#50 *“if you didn’t understand, they tried explaining in our home language.”*

#34 *“Well, ja, they switched ... there were some teachers ... they don’t allow student to switch the languages but then they can switch it.”*

#50 *“Ja, they did, like, eh, explain some things, like, if you didn’t understand they tried explaining in our home language.”*

#75 *“There was issues with my Afrikaans, it wasn’t so good, so they had to explain some ... concepts in English ... sometimes ... teacher’s will s-, encourage it and sometimes they’ll say no.”*

Regarding this last comment, note that Afrikaans was the LoLT at the primary school (and also high school; see Tables 5.5 and 5.6) of Limpopo Participants #55 and #75. At 33 years old, Participant #55 was the oldest participant in this study. Given his age, it can be assumed that he attended school before 1994, during the time of Bantu education. During the interview, he did not make any mention of Afrikaans; he did, however, mention that it was difficult for him to learn English. Participant #75 mentioned attending an Afrikaans-medium primary school and, when in high school, choosing to study Afrikaans as a L2. He explained his schooling as follows:

#75 *“... my education was quite modest. Uh, ah, from Grade 1 to Grade 7 I studied, uh, in Laerskool Bxx.¹⁸ That’s the town I’m from, Bxx ... High school, I went to a private college; it’s called Cxx*

¹⁸ All identifying interview information has been changed to maintain the anonymity of the participant.

College ... There's like, three languages ... English, Afrikaans and Sepedi, and then I took the English and Afrikaans there."

Table 5.5: Languages used by Limpopo participants and their teachers in primary school and as the official LoLT in the primary school

| Language | Percentage of participants indicating | | |
|-------------------|---|--|---|
| | that they used the language at primary school | that their primary school teacher(s) used the language | that this was the official LoLT in their primary school |
| Afrikaans | 8.3 | 11.1 | 8.3 |
| English | 72.2 | 66.7 | 72.2 |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 25 | 16.7 | 11.1 |
| Xitsonga | 11.1 | 13.9 | 11.1 |
| Tshivenda | 19.4 | 22.2 | 16.7 |
| isiZulu | 2.8 | 2.8 | 0 |

Table 5.6 indicates the languages used during the Limpopo participants' high school education. English received a much higher percentage compared to that for primary school, with 92% of the participants indicating that their teachers used this language, despite English being the official LoLT at only 81% of their high schools. (Again, similar results were obtained for the participants as a whole.) It is assumed that high school teachers were stricter than primary school teachers regarding implementing the official LoLT where this was English, but some teachers also used English even though it was not the official LoLT of the school. Examples from the interviews support this statement:

#24 *"my high school, the teachers there were using English all the time"*

#50 *"... but they mostly said that we have to talk English"*

#59 *"... but in high school it was, uh, English only"*

#59 *"Uh, in primary they used to teach us in English, ... sometimes they used our home language to teach us but in high school it was, uh, English only."*

Table 5.6: Languages used by Limpopo participants and their teachers in high school and as the official LoLT in the high school

| Language | Percentage of participants indicating | | |
|-------------------|--|---|--|
| | that they used the language at high school | that their high school teacher(s) used the language | that this was the official LoLT in their high school |
| Afrikaans | 5.6 | 8.3 | 8.3 |
| English | 80.6 | 91.7 | 80.6 |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 19.4 | 8.3 | 8.3 |
| Xitsonga | 8.3 | 2.8 | 5.6 |
| Tshivenda | 8.3 | 16.7 | 8.3 |

The participants' real and preferred group-work languages are presented in Table 5.7 overleaf. Note that participants could mention more than one language in response to the questions regarding group-work languages. English is listed often, as expected (given that it is the LoLT at the VUT), with 78% of the Limpopo participants indicating that they used this language during classroom group work and the same percentage indicating that this was the language they would prefer to use during group work. Interestingly, English is used more during out-of-class group work than during in-class group work. Considering the previously mentioned problem of African languages not (yet) having been developed for use at tertiary level of study, it is noteworthy that a total of 47% of the participants indicated that they would prefer to use an African language in group work. Many of the interviewed participants said that they prefer to work in English, but that they will easily code switch to help a fellow group member understand better. Such code switching appears to be a very effective study tool, and a positive attitude towards this practice was portrayed by the interviewed participants. Consider the following responses in this regard:

#34 *"We only use English to express what we are supposed to ... let's say it's a question, we have to answer it, we answer it using English ... When we are asking each other the question we can ask each other the question with different languages but then answering it must be in English."*

#117 *"Yes, we do use English [when doing group work], uh, because we find that in a group, it's not only Vendas in a group; we can find that we have international students ... Some students, which are Zulu, Pedi ... so we try to use English ... to cover everyone."*

The only interviewed participant who did not indicate English as a language used in groups outside the classroom or a preferred language was Participant #10. From her interview, it was clear that she struggled with English in terms of both understanding and expression. She had not had a lot of exposure to English prior to entering university, as indicated in this excerpt of her interview:

#10: Not an ... it was not an easy journey, since I didn't start using it [English], when, if I did use it, when I was thinking I'll get used to it, since I started using it while I grew up it wasn't easy.

Interviewer: So what age did you start using English?

#10: Like, where I start using it, like mostly, is last year.

Interviewer: Your age now is?

#10: Twenty-two.

Table 5.7: Languages used and preferred by Limpopo participants in group work

| Language | Percentage of participants indicating | | |
|-------------------|---|---|--|
| | that they use the language during group work in class | that they use the language during group work out of class | that they would prefer to use the language during group work |
| Afrikaans | 5.6 | 2.8 | 2.8 |
| English | 77.8 | 83.3 | 77.8 |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | 25 | 5.6 | 16.7 |
| Sesotho | 5.6 | 0 | 8.3 |
| Xitsonga | 11.1 | 13.9 | 8.3 |
| Tshivenda | 13.9 | 2.8 | 11.1 |
| isiXhosa | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.8 |

When asked whether it is valuable to know more than one language, 92% of the Limpopo participants answered “yes” and another 3% answered “maybe/sometimes”, with the rest not providing any answer to this question. No Limpopo participant answered “no”. Again, as in the case of the larger sample, it was indicated that the importance of knowing more than one language lies in the ability it affords one to communicate with different people from different cultures. Other Limpopo participants referred to usefulness when travelling. One participant (#55) stated, *to acknowledge other languages*. Whereas it is not clear exactly what this participant meant by this, one could interpret it as meaning that one acknowledges the worth of other language groups by addressing them in their language. The following are representative of the reasons provided:

#19 *because it is nice to know other languages and understand them so that it can be easy for me to socialise with them.*

#53 *some people are too lazy to learn other languages even English, so they prefer their language more than others. To communicate with them you have to utilize their language.*

#44 *It expands your intellectual level in a way. You do not have to struggle understanding others if ever you get an opportunity to visit, you feel less lost.*

The last question of the questionnaire asked the participants if they found it difficult to use different languages at different times. The result was that 50% of the Limpopo participants said “yes” and 42% said “no”. Some did not answer the question, and 3% indicated “sometimes” or “maybe”. Again, as with the larger sample, the reason given most for finding it difficult to switch languages was that the participants did not understand or know one or more particular languages. Some found it easy because they had been doing it for a long time, as was the case for Participant #87 who stated, *In high school, the language we used was English so even here we use English*. A few also mentioned that they preferred using English only and therefore do not have to switch between languages often. Below are some of the reasons provided by those who said that they found switching difficult, which can be summarised as lack of proficiency in a sufficient number of languages and a sense that miscommunication is more likely:

#75 *... simply because of the lack of practice and I am used to a single language.*

#90 *Because I only know two languages that I am good at and the rest is just a language barrier.*

#34 *Because some people just switch to other languages that I don't understand.*

#50 *Sometimes I don't understand what people are saying.*

#119 *Usually I have to explain something in English and I take time to find a suitable word.*

#18 *Because sometimes you can feel like if you made mistake they will laugh at you.*

#79 *Is difficult because you can get misunderstood and misunderstand.*

#54 *Somehow I find it difficult to switch to isiZulu because my girlfriend is a Zulu, so we always communicate in English.*

5.5 Summary of the Limpopo participants' linguistic profile

The second research question of this study was “What is the language profile of the 2015 and 2016 second-year Applied Communication Skills VUT students from the Limpopo region?” An interesting range and fairly high number of languages were indicated even in the small sample, and therefore the conclusion can be made that the students from Limpopo are indeed very multilingual. The findings showed that, on average, participants were able to use four languages effectively.

From the data, there were also many other interesting findings that lead to deeper investigation into the role of English in the lives of these university students. One of the aims was to look at the L1s and L2s of the Limpopo participants and to ascertain what role English played within their language repertoires. It was found that English was listed as the third language of some of the participants, and calculations indicated that up to 11% of students enrolling at higher education institutions like the VUT are not proficient in the official LoLT of that institution. It was also found that the overall use of English is very prevalent in education even within a highly multilingual sample, and that in most cases students actually preferred to use English during group work with other students. Upon investigating the educational journey of the participants, it was found that primary school teachers were more open to code switching in the classroom between the mother tongue and English than high school teachers were. The latter were reluctant to code switch and preferred learners to use the LoLT (mostly English) only. Even so, 50% of the Limpopo participants still reported that they found it difficult to switch between languages.

Chapter 6: English skills of the Limpopo students

6.1 English skills considered

In this chapter, I consider some performance-based evidence with regard to the standard of English being taught in South Africa. This is done by looking at the performances recorded for the small group of Limpopo students who were interviewed. These recorded performances include the symbols obtained for languages in the NSC, the mark obtained for the first-year level EDL course compared to the hours spent on completing this course, and one of the semester marks received for ACS2. A general comparison of these marks will be made in section 6.4, followed by general observations made regarding the spelling and grammar in the essays. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an indication of the English language proficiency of students who mostly studied English for 12 years as a subject at school and had English as LoLT for 9 years at school before entering a university at which the sole LoLT is English. To ensure complete anonymity, the participants were assigned new participant numbers. Also recall that ethical clearance for the study was granted by the VUT on condition that, amongst others, exact percentages obtained for any subject or course will not be made known.

6.2 The National Senior Certificate symbols obtained for languages

In this section, the matriculation symbols of the sample of Limpopo students will be discussed briefly. These symbols refer to the average mark that a student obtained for each subject after completing the national examination. The certificate that is then awarded to the student is known as the National Senior Certificate (NSC). No marks are presented but the level (i.e. the percentage range) is indicated per subject, giving the reader an overall idea of the final mark on the matriculation certificates. Seven of the eight interviewed participants' NSC marks were available from the VUT, and these are presented in Table 6.1. As can be seen from this table, only one participant had Afrikaans as a matriculation subject, and this participant obtained a mark of 30% to 34% for this language. All students had English as a First Additional Language, and all participants except one obtained an average mark of 60% or more (the participant who did not obtain at least 60% had an average of 40% to 49%). This means that 86% of these participants passed matric at Level 5 (60% – 69%). Three participants had Sepedi as a subject, with their marks ranging between 40% and 79%. Both the participants that took Tshivenda had an average mark of 70% to 79%. The two participants who had Xitsonga as NSC subject obtained between 70% and 79% as a final mark.

Table 6.1: Average symbols acquired by the interviewed Limpopo participants for languages studied for the NSC

| Symbol | Number of participants who obtained this symbol for | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---------|-------------------|-----------|----------|
| | Afrikaans | English | N. Sotho / Sepedi | Tshivenda | Xitsonga |
| A Symbol (80 – 100%; Level 7) | | | | | 1 |
| B Symbol (70 – 79%; Level 6) | | | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| C Symbol (60 – 69%; Level 5) | | 6 | 1 | | |
| D Symbol (50 – 59%; Level 4) | | | | | |
| E Symbol (40 – 49%; Level 3) | | 1 | 1 | | |
| F Symbol (35 – 39%; Level 2) | | | | | |
| FF Symbol (30 – 34%; Level 1) | 1 | | | | |

6.3 Marks obtained for the English Development and Learning course

6.3.1 Background information on the English Development and Learning course

The compulsory English Development Learning (EDL) course at the VUT is a one-year computer-based course that tests and develops students' proficiency in English. Students complete a diagnostic placement test the first time they work on the computer program. Depending on the mark received for this placement test, a student is then assigned a level, namely Level R (equivalent to preschool English proficiency) or Levels A (equivalent to Grade 1 English proficiency) to I (equivalent to Grade 9 English proficiency). This proficiency is based on USA norms for L2 learners of English. These levels each have 20 lessons in language and 20 lessons in reading strategies that have to be completed before advancing to the next level. Students work at their own pace and in their own time to complete the program up to level I20. This means that if a student fared well in the placement test, they will start at a higher level and will require fewer hours to reach Level I20 than a student who fared poorly in the placement test and had to start at a lower level. In order to pass EDL, a student must receive an average mark of 70% and must be able to read 300 words per minute in English. The marks are not necessarily an indication of the student's performance and knowledge; rather, the amount of time spent on the program is an indication of how well or poorly the students are performing. More hours spent on EDL means the program took the student back to previous lessons for revision purposes and to reinforce some concepts that the student might not have mastered yet. This is a built-in intervention tool, therefore when considering the EDL performance, it is essential to look at the hours spent on the program, as lessons can be redone in order to achieve the required average mark. The assumption is thus that the more competent a student is in English, the fewer hours will be spent completing the lessons and obtaining the required marks.

In 2015, a survey was done in order to report on VUT students' experiences of the course. It was found that the EDL course helps students with further learning and in their other subjects: Marias (2015) explains that it encourages students' active engagement in their learning process by creating a learning environment with clear goals. Although EDL does not carry any course credits, it has had an overall positive outcome on student learning and on the improvement of English language and vocabulary skills. EDL received very positive feedback, as reported by Marias (2015:2), with 79% of the participating 879 students giving positive comments and 17% both positive and negative. Marias (2015:6) reports that only 1% of the participants gave negative comments and concludes that the positive response shows that EDL adds well-defined academic value to VUT students' university learning experience. The interviewed students' experience of the EDL course will be briefly discussed later in this chapter.

6.3.2 EDL data of the interviewed Limpopo participants

From the eight interview participants, only three had completed the EDL program (these participants will be referred to as Participants 1, 2 and 3), with another participant (Participant 4) starting in 2015 and working 22:45 hours after which s/he did not return to complete the outstanding levels. The four other participants were registered for the program but had never accessed it. (Students are able to enrol for EDL any and every year until they pass this compulsory course.) Of the three students that worked on the EDL program, Participant 1 started on Level G (Grade 7 equivalent) and worked for 137:33 hours, Participant 2 started on Level F (Grade 6 equivalent) and worked for 187:15 hours, and Participant 3 started on Level D (Grade 4 equivalent) and worked for 143:27 hours. Consider Graph 6.1.

| | | Time spent reaching exit level I20 | | |
|-------|---|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Level | | 137:33:00 | 143:27:00 | 187:15:00 |
| | I | | | |
| | H | | | |
| | G | | | |
| | F | | | |
| | E | | | |
| | D | | | |
| | | Participant 1 | Participant 3 | Participant #2 |

Graph 6.1: Hours worked from entry level to exit level on the EDL program

What can be seen from the graph is that even if a student starts at a lower level, they work at their own pace and can even complete the course in fewer hours than someone who started at a higher level. For instance, Participant 3 worked fewer hours to progress from Level D to Level I than

Participant 2 worked to progress from Level F to level I. Participant 1 worked the least number of hours of the three, but spread the work out over a longer time: Participant 1 enrolled in 2013 but only completed EDL in 2015, whereas the other two participants both completed EDL in the same year as registering for it. Of the remaining interviewees, three enrolled in 2014 and one in 2015 but, as mentioned, have not worked on their EDL yet.

6.4 Marks obtained for Applied Communication Skills 2

In this section, the interviewed students' marks for ACS2 will be compared to the class average. Of the eight interview participants, one enrolled in 2013, five in 2014 and two in 2015. These participants had to finish ACS1 before moving on to ACS2 and, as discussed in section 3.2, these students are not necessarily historically second-year students, but they are all attending the second-year level of ACS. From Table 6.2, it can be seen that four participants obtained a below-average mark, one an average mark and three an above-average mark. In other words, the final year mark for the Limpopo sample taken from the entire class can be described as follows: 50% scored below the class average, 37.5% scored above the class average, and 17% obtained the class average mark. The highest mark recorded was 70% and the lowest was the minimum pass requirement of 50%, and only two of the eight Limpopo participants had 60% or more. The average mark that the interviewed Limpopo participants obtained for ACS2 was 59.5% and the total average of all the ACS2 classes in which these participants were placed had a combined average of 60.8%. This means that the average Limpopo student fared as well in ACS2 as the classes as a whole.

Table 6.2: Limpopo participant average compared to class average for ACS2

| | Class 1 | Class 2 | Class 3 | Class 4 | Class 5 | Class 6 |
|--|----------------|-------------------------|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Average mark for whole class | 60 | 62 | 56 | 55 | 67 | 65 |
| Interviewed Limpopo students' marks compared to class averages | 1 x Average | 1 x Below average | 1 x Above average 1 x Below average | 2 x Below average | 1 x Above average | 1 x Above average |

6.5 Marks comparison between matriculation year and second-year ACS

In this section, I compare the NSC average marks for English to those obtained by the participants for ACS2. One participant's NSC was not available, and therefore the discussion is only on seven of the interviewed participants.

Three participants fared better in ACS2 than in the NSC, and the opposite is the case for another three participants. One student fared the same. ACS2 is obviously not the same as Matric English, and the marks improvement does not directly signify improvement in English skills, but a 42% improvement (as was the case for one participant) from Matric to second-year university is probably an indication of significant improvement in English proficiency.

6.6 Evaluation of the English essays written by the interviewed Limpopo participants

Recall that the interviewed participants were asked to write a 300-word essay on "My life as a student". This section lists some of the errors of general grammar, vocabulary choice and spelling that the participants made in their essays. In order to contextualise this discussion, I must point out that many VUT students find it challenging to write effectively and coherently in English. The ACS lecturers experience this, but these problems are not restricted to the ACS course: an inability to write academic English well sometimes influences the marking of examinations and other assessments, as well as the overall impression that lecturers (of ACS and those teaching other subjects) have of the student's knowledge and understanding. This is not just a VUT-specific problem, though. Consider in this regard the work of Chokwe (2013:382) who also found that pertinent challenges are negatively impacting the teaching and learning of writing skills, and attributes these factors to things such as colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. Chokwe (2013:377) states that in the marginalisation of blacks, there are the problems of underprepared teachers and ineffective teaching of writing in schools which also provided fewer writing activities. Chokwe (2013:382) explains that this lack of proper schooling in reading and writing in turn creates a problem in higher learning institutions. Chokwe (2013:382) suggests that, rather than attributing the poor writing skills to the poor schooling system only, academic staff at universities should take responsibility and contribute to addressing the academic writing problems of their students.

In that regard, the VUT has done the following: as stated before, ACS is a compulsory course for all VUT students, and students have to pass this course at first- and second-year level for degree purposes. ACS2 focuses on English presentation skills (including public speaking) and other work-related English communication skills (such as those required during job interviews and meetings),

but ACS1 (the first-year modules) focuses on writing skills. The first two modules of ACS1 attempt to bridge the writing skills developed at school and those required at university but, up to this point, this has been done with little success. A possible reason for this lack of success in the development of students' writing skills could be that the time available at university is simply not enough to allow for all the development that needs to take place. Trying to remedy the lack of required academic writing skills entails trying to “squeeze” 12 years' worth of schooling into four semesters at university, a task highly improbable to be completed successfully. Chokwe (2013:378) confirms this by stating that schools play a critical role in this development, and if writing skills are not addressed adequately at the school level, the higher education sector will remain overwhelmed with students who are academically underprepared and present with poor writing skills.

In an effort to allow students to develop the minimum English language skills required to access lecture content, textbooks and class discussions, the ACS1 units target listening skills, reading and reading comprehension skills, writing skills (spelling and grammar), research skills (dictionary use and referencing skills), paraphrasing, paragraphing, structuring main ideas succinctly, summarising, and report writing. Many sections on writing skills have been added to the already condensed ACS1 curriculum in the hope of improving the writing ability and standard of writing of the students. A writing laboratory has also been a valuable addition to the library services, with staff assisting students with academic writing and referencing. The issue of poor writing skills is also one of the reasons why EDL was introduced, in other words, to develop academic and also English language skills of VUT students.

This section serves to portray the English writing skills of students, English being their LoLT. Upon scrutinising the essays, I observed that, in most cases, I could work out the intended meaning of what the students wrote, but in many instances the errors¹⁹ in their written English were of such a nature that they could cause a lecturer to lower a borderline mark to a fail mark as a result of potential miscommunication and misunderstanding and a lack of ability to communicate ideas, thoughts and solutions clearly. Bear in mind that (1) the topic of the essay did not necessarily require technical writing and should thus not have taxed second-year students in any significant manner, and (2) the errors presented below are those of students who have passed English in their NSC examinations, have had two semester modules of ACS1 that focused on English writing skills, and, in most cases, have completed or are in the process of completing the EDL course – yet common errors are found in their written English. Below are examples

¹⁹ The difference between errors and mistakes, according to Stanley (2016:53-54), is that errors are instances where there were “failed expectations” (i.e., the student does not know how to produce the target form) and mistakes entail a miss-take (i.e., the student knows how to produce the target form but something went wrong accidentally).

taken from the essays that the participants wrote after the interviews.²⁰ In order to maintain anonymity, the errors will be presented in random order with no reference to participant numbers. In each case, the relevant error is indicated in bold with the correction in square brackets:

Errors of subject-verb agreement were frequently made, as illustrated in the following two excerpts:

1. ... a student **where** [*was*] likely more influenced [*influenced more*] by the environment I grew up in right up to [*even as far as / taking into account*] the place
2. Our teachers **was** [*were*] always couraging [*encouraging*] us to speak english [*English*], so that we can [*could*] get used to it

Errors pertaining to the correct form of past-tense constructions were also frequently observed. Consider the following examples in this regard:

3. ... our preside [*president*] **use** [*used*] to code swith [*switch*] in [*between*] his language[s].
4. The way [*reason*] I **learn** [*learned/learnt*] how to speak about 7 languages was due to the place I was staying [*in*] ...
5. Our teachers was [*were*] always couraging [*encouraging*] us to speak english [*English*], so that we **can** [*could*] get used to it
6. I've [*I've*] **meet** [*met*] [*a*] lot of different people.

Selection of an inappropriate preposition was a common occurrence, as demonstrated in the following two excerpts:

7. ... enjoyable only if you take responsibility **about** [*for*] your studies ...
8. I thing [*think*] that's the negative thing **to** use [*about* using] English only [*only English*] when [*I*] communicate with others.
9. ... our preside [*president*] use [*used*] to code swith [*switch*] **in** [*between*] his language[s].

²⁰ Note that no attempt is made here at error analysis or at explaining the possible cause of particular errors. I am aware of the fast body of research on L2 writing but I do not refer to it here because the errors are presented here merely to provide an indication of the types of errors that occur in these second-year university students' written English work (in most cases after 12 years of studying English as a subject at school, having English as LoLT for 9 years at school and at least one year at university, and completing at least one year of ACS and some EDL levels).

Participants also made word order errors, some of which changed the intended meaning of their sentences:

10. *I thing [think] that's the negative thing to use [about using] **English only** [only English] when [I] communicate with others.*
11. *... a student where [was] likely **more influenced** [influenced more] by the environment I grew up in right up to [even as far as / taking into account] the place*

At times, words were omitted, and at other times words were inappropriately inserted. These words were mainly function words, as can be seen below. In the examples, articles are often omitted. Not illustrated below is that the definite article “the” was sometimes replaced with the indefinite article “a”, changing the meaning of a sentence.

12. *When you are at varsity or at any institution that is of higher qualit-y [quality] education [of higher education][,] you mix your languages and you forget som-e [some] of [**the**] words in your own language.*
13. *I have met [**a**] lot of people ...*
14. *My life as a student was not that easy compared to [**my**] one as [**a**] learner.*
15. *Being a student I experience [**a**] lot of things.*
16. *I'v [I've] meet [met] [**a**] lot of different people.*
17. *The way [reason] I learn [learned/learnt] how to speak about 7 languages was due to the place I was staying [**in**]...*
18. *I nearly [**was**] not going to make it on [become skilled at] speaking ...*
19. *... as [**I**] don't belive [believe] most of the things i [I] know and apply daily where [were] taught [taught] in the class room [classroom].*
20. *I thing [think] that's the negative thing to use [about using] English only [only English] when [I] communicate with others.*
21. *The worst part is that as [of being] a student is that you sometimes fail[,] even though **if** [**if**] you are really trying **all** [**all**] your best.*

Sentences were often presented as sentence fragments, with the subject having been omitted. Other, more difficult to classify grammar errors included the following:

22. ... factors to consider **as to** [**such as**] how you grow up
23. I have experienced many other languages like Zulu, Venda [and] Tsonga **when I'm** [**while being**] here ...
24. ... a student where [was] likely [probably] more influenced [influenced more] by the environment **I** [s/he / **they**] grew up in right up to [even as far as/ taking into account] the place

There were instances where choice of words was not suitable for the context. At times, the phrases selected to convey a particular meaning were inappropriate, as illustrated below:

25. The **way** [**reason**] I learn [learned/learnt] how to speak about 7 languages was due to the place I was staying [in]
26. I nearly [was] not **going to make it on** [**become skilled at**] speaking ...
27. ... a student where [was] **likely** [**probably**] more influenced [influenced more] by the environment I grew up in **right up to** [even as far as/ taking into account] the place
28. When you are at varsity or at any institution **that is of higher qualit-y** [quality] **education** [**of higher education**][,] you mix your languages and you [might] forget som-e [some] of [the] words in your own language.

ACS1 has a section on dictionary skills to familiarise students with using a dictionary and the segments of a dictionary entry. They are encouraged to consult a dictionary for the correct spelling of words. Nevertheless, spelling errors frequently occur in their academic writing. Such errors – mostly on non-technical words – also occurred frequently in their essays. Below is a selection of these errors. In addition to the spelling errors, the omission of punctuation marks (especially commas) was common.

belive [*believe*]

brothers [*brother's* / *brothers'*] friends (Possession indication is taught as part of the ACS1 syllabus, but students often omit or misplace the apostrophe.)

class room [*classroom*]

code swith [*switch*]

couraging [*encouraging*]

english [*English*]

indupended [*independent*]

I'v [*I've*]

paireats [*parents*]

preside [*president*]

qualit-y [quality]

som-e [some]

swith [switch]

thing [think]

tought [taught]

where [were]

6.7 Summary of the recorded English language skills of the interviewed Limpopo participants

In this chapter, the performance evidence was reviewed in general to determine the standard of English being taught in South Africa. This was done by looking at the performances recorded for the small group of students that came for an interview, and general remarks were reported. The NSC marks for languages of only seven of the eight participants were available. Most of the final marks received for the NSC for English were at Level 5, that is, 60% to 69%. Only one student had an NSC English mark below 50%. Overall, most participants obtained higher average NSC marks for their other languages than for English, except in the case of one participant who had an average NSC mark for Afrikaans of below 35% and another whose Sepedi mark was below 50%.

The second part of the investigation pertained to the hours spent on the first-year level EDL course as well as the importance thereof. It was stated that EDL is a very important subject for VUT students to better their English skills and that the hours spent on completing the program is more representative of achievement than their final mark is.

The semester marks received for ACS2 were discussed, and it was found from the small number of interviewed Limpopo participants that more students finished with a mark lower than the class average than those above the class average, but overall these students' respective averages are only about 1% under the overall class average.

The last part of Chapter 6 concluded that there were multiple language and spelling errors in the essays written by the participants. When one considers the transcripts of the interviews and compares them as a whole to the essays as a whole, the impression is that fewer grammar errors occurred in the interviews (thus in the spoken English) than in the essays (thus in the written English). The essay data indicated that participants struggle with English writing, even when such writing is non-academic in nature. It is problematic that these students still struggle with writing non-academic English despite having been

taught English at school and for at least one year at university, because English is their sole LoLT and at second-year level they are expected to produce good academic prose in English. If one considers that six of the students who wrote these essays obtained a mark of 60 – 69% for English in Matric, then one may conclude that adequate marks for English at school exit does not necessarily correlate with basic but adequate academic writing skills in English, and that even those students who obtained good marks for English at school might need support to develop the type of English skills required to succeed at a university at which English is the only LoLT.

Chapter 7: Language-related themes emerging from the interviews with the Limpopo participants

7.1 The interviews conducted with the Limpopo students

In this chapter, I will discuss themes pertaining to language that were not present in the questionnaire data but that emerged from the interviews with the Limpopo students. The aim is to present the information that the Limpopo students gave regarding their LoLTs and regarding how English affects their lives in general. The data presented here is obviously subjective as each student described his/her experiences regarding LoLT and the usage of English in the region in which s/he grew up. However, reoccurring themes can be taken to be salient and a representation of reality, as these students had no way of knowing what questions would be posed during the interview, thus being unable to discuss their answers beforehand.

This chapter will be divided into the themes that I identified as repeatedly expressed ideas and therefore as probably truthful feelings towards the education system in the Limpopo province, and towards English, their home language and their LoLT. Participants' responses will be presented under each theme, and in the summary I will provide an interpretation of these responses as a whole.

7.2 The importance of knowing your home language

Many positive statements were made by the interviewed students about their home languages, indicating that these languages play an important role in the lives of the participants. It transpired from the questionnaire data and also from the interviews that even though English is very important for studies, for communication with those outside of the family and on social media, the home language is still the language “carrying” cultural and family values and norms. Here are some examples of what interviewees said regarding their home language.

#50 *“It’s [My home language is] part of mine [my culture], I’m proud of it.”*

#59 *“Because my dad is Tsonga, so, whenever I speak Tsonga I, I feel proud, ‘cause that’s, that’s my home language ... it makes me who I am.”*

#10 *“My home language, I do really enjoy it ‘cause I understand it hundred percent sure, than the one I’m not sure of, yeah.”*

Another theme was that participants underwent language shift to English (or were perceived by speakers of their home language to have undergone such shift) with negative consequences. Consider the following two excerpts in this regard:

#34 *“My language are not that, from the rest of South African languages, is the most difficult one ... Tshivenda ... my home language means a lot to me. Uh, I was born there, I grew up there using the same language until ... when I passed high school I changed the language completely ... Now I don’t even know some of the, uh, words in my home language because I usually ... use English. You go to any kind of a person of another different language ... ask them, ... ‘How is it, your language influencing you from learning more about this world?’. You’ll find out that only your language teaches you how to understand your culture. Your language does that.”*

#75 *“There’s this thing whereby people who, like, especially in my culture, they look down on you for knowing English ... forgetting your culture, like you did it on purpose, but it wasn’t on purpose ... whereby you forgot your language. You didn’t, but they look down on you ... especially with Afrikaners ... they’re strict with their culture, they, they don’t play around with that, so I think you [the Afrikaans L1 interviewer] ... relate. I think you can.”*

One participant reported that those who do not speak his/her language as L1 negatively view people who do speak his/her L1, and that that causes this participant to speak a language other than his/her L1 outside of the family context. The relevant excerpt of this interview is presented below:

#48: Ah, you know, uh, Tsonga actually is not quite a nice language ... (laughs) No one wants to be Tsonga; everyone they say, “No, I’m not Tsonga, I’m not Tsonga” ... (laughs) ... So I don’t speak Tsonga outside ... I speak English, so that I don’t want to be noted as Tsonga (laughs).

Interviewer: But why? Can I ask?

#48: Ey! I don’t know but ... Tsonga ... Every time when maybe when you are speaking something they say, “Ah, that one is Tsonga.” When ... someone is doing something weird, they say, “Ah, that one is Tsonga” ... or maybe “That one is from Limpopo”. You see, those kind of stuff ...

Interviewer: Wow, so you actually get labelled because of that?

#48: They’ll say, “That one is Tsonga” or maybe “That one is from Limpopo”, so I, I don’t want to be specified in that ...

Whereas the participants generally valued their home language, they were also multilingual (as demonstrated by the questionnaire data and the language portraits), and all of them spoke English, although not with native-speaker proficiency. In the next two sections, I present two commonly-held views on English amongst the interviewed Limpopo participants.

7.3 The usefulness of English

This section cites examples of comments by the interviewed students on the usefulness of English. The main idea expressed was that English was a useful tool: it was used for overcoming language barriers and the fact that English is at least a second or third language of most students on campus made it useful as a lingua franca.

#59 *“I think it’s [English is] a positive thing ... because you meet some people who, who can’t speak ... your language ... but then they know how to speak English so the only way you can communicate is in English.”*

#48 *“Uhm, normally we use English [when discussing academic work with other students] because ... I always have international students in my groups.”*

#48 *“We should keep on teaching English and then maybe we try to reduce this language, in South Africa we have lots of languages ... Keep it simple ... You know, ah, I’ve noticed ... maybe USA, they don’t have difficulties in communicating ... all of them, because they’re using one official language ... Like, a little girl ... who’s speaking Zulu ... because she can’t probably hear you. Even she’s lost, how are you going to know she’s lost? So it’s going to help if we keep speaking, maybe, like, one common language.”*

Also consider the following exchange during which I prompted the student to mention other uses for English, but the student insisted that English is only used to overcome communication problems with those who do not share another language:

Interviewer: Is it only to help you if there’s a language barrier?

#10: Ja

Interviewer: Is that the only time?

#10: Hmmm ... (signalling affirmation)

7.4 The enjoyment of English

Other interviewed participants reported using English for reasons other than out of necessity, stating that they enjoy doing so. These participants seemed to have a positive attitude towards English, as demonstrated by the excerpts below.

#48 *“I enjoy using English a lot. Even, uhm, me and my mom, we don’t talk using Pedi or Tsonga.”*

#34 *“Now around campus ... more of Pedi than English, I only using English when I’m speaking to people like you right now ... And I socialise with it a lot ... even with my Venda fellow friends I did that, I used English.”*

#50 *“I enjoy English ... Some of our friends, we chat with English, we chat about English, we chat in English ... Even if you are a Pedi’s, just talk English.”*

#75 *“I love it [English]! I love reading it; I love the joke, you know; I love the use of oxymorons, verbal structures and everything ... And idioms, ja, I love, I love using them. I love, I love ... I love, I love English comedy more than normal comedy, ‘cause with English comedy, né, it’s, it’s intelligent.”*

One participant stated that s/he wouldn’t teach his/her children an African language, only English. Although this was said in connection with English being a useful lingua franca, such a statement does reflect that the participant views English positively.

#48 *“Yes ... [I think that it’s a good thing if South Africa adopted one common language]. That’s what I, I’m thinking of doing, if I have a kid. Ah, I never learned my home language ... so when I have a kid, my kid ... won’t learn Sotho or Tsonga; he’s going to learn English.”*

7.5 Unsuccessful strategies or difficulties in the teaching and learning of English at school

In the following two sections, I report participant views on the general education system in Limpopo and on the conditions in which they learned English. I discuss their negative comments in this section before turning to the positive comments in section 7.6.

Many of the remarks of interviewed participants indicated that they struggled with learning at school (in general – not specifically English as a subject), especially because the LoLT was English and they had limited proficiency in that language. The pattern was that, regardless of the official LoLT of the schools,

their primary schooling was largely in a mother tongue with little English, and in high school the switch was made to almost entirely English as medium of instruction. This was a difficult adaption for the participants as the foundations laid for English were not always good at the time of the switch to English as medium of instruction. Claims were made that the English instruction was difficult to follow and that teachers' English was not up to standard. Consider the following statements by Participant #34 on when the switch to English as medium of instruction took place and on how the learners experienced it:

#34 *"In primary school ... they used my home language because I think they knew that we were not that good in English, but then immediately when I passed Grade 7, ... the teachers there were using English all the time."*

#34 *"It [using English as the LoLT] started when I was in Grade 8, starting with s- subjects like Life Orientation, English itself, Natural Sciences ... There you see, you were supposed to understand before you answer the question, and the question was asked in English ..."*

#34 *"We were bad at English [at the time at which the LoLT changed to English only]. I mean, I was worse ... until I learned some of the concept under ... it."*

#34 *"Ja, it was at the first three months to four [after the switch to English as sole LoLT], it was difficult ... Uh, when we were writing the March exam I didn't perform that well, just because of the language problems, well, but then, by the end of the year ... it was ... fine."*

Another frequently expressed view was that there were not enough resources to teach effectively, and that this had a negative effect on the participants' learning experience. In order to contextualise the excerpts below, I mention that during the interview most participants could be clearly understood despite their English skills often not being well-developed. They frequently spoke in a laboured manner, as if working hard to do the best with what English skills they had. The exception was Participant #10, the participant who admitted to not using English until s/he had to do so at university the year before and who seemed to struggle the most to express himself/herself during the interview. This participant mostly affirmed the interviewer's statements with only filler sounds, rarely expressing his/her thoughts independent of the interviewer. Consider the excerpt below, where s/he uncharacteristically did answer questions without using filler sounds only, although still in a somewhat cryptic manner:

Interviewer: Which year in school did you start speaking English?

#10: Grade 8.

Interviewer: So you didn't have any primary school English?

#10: In primary school we did it, but just a little bit.

Other participants made the following comments, amongst others, regarding the school education they received in Limpopo:

#50 *"I can say that, the education [in Limpopo Province] is not that highly recommended but, eh but, I think I did great until I come over here."*

#34 *"My education in Limpopo, it was not that high because of lacking in languages and equipments."*

#48 *"Ah, the education that I received at Limpopo, it was ... it was quite fine, ah, but near where my school was or where I was located we never had the library stuff."*

#50 *"I come from ... a rural place ... The school that I went in ... it's fine, but, it lacks, eh, some resources, materials ..."*

#59 *"Okay, my education that I've received in Limpopo ... I wouldn't say it was high, but ... I always worked hard at school. Our school didn't have, eh, proper ... educational stuff. Even textbooks, we didn't have enough textbooks. So, but I can say ... because of our hard work we managed ... to pass Grade 12."*

7.6 Code switching as pedagogical strategy regardless of the official LoLT being English

This section reports some of the positive feedback and remarks that participants gave regarding their schooling in Limpopo and also specifically regarding English being the LoLT at their schools. During the interviews, it was a recurring theme that the schools attended by the participants officially had English as LoLT, that a language other than English was very often or exclusively used at primary school level, and that code switching from English to this language occurred (less frequently) at high school level, as could also be seen in Participant #34's statements in the previous section. Consider the following excerpts in this regard:

Interviewer: English, is that ... their [Participant #48's schools'] official language of learning and teaching?

#48: Ja, ... in primary school ... they used my home language ... In high school, they mixed both, and tertiary level right now ... it's mixed up ...

Interviewer: And what about [the languages used at your] secondary school?

#48: We used Tsonga and English.

Interviewer: What was the official ... language policy?

#48: They're saying it's English.

What often helped these participants to understand what their teachers were teaching them was the fact that the teachers code switched to their mother tongue. Often the teachers would code switch but would discourage their learners to do so, with varying levels of success, as stated by Participant #10: *"They, they wanted us to talk English but ... it wasn't a must so we mostly used ... our home language."* Consider the following statements on code switching used as a pedagogical strategy:

#55 *"They, they [the teachers] used to code so that we can understand, ja, English, ja."*

#117 *"Uhm, mostly they [the teachers] used English but for us to understand they, sometimes, uh, explained in our home language which, which was Venda ... Like, if I don't understand something and I can't put it in English I could ask in Venda."*

#34 *"Well, ja, they [the teachers] switched ... It was only depending on how the person is understanding, or when he or she asked the question."*

#48 *"Maybe they're [the teachers are] using English, and then they saw that we never got it, then they will switch into Tsonga so that we can get what they're saying ... it simplified stuff."*

7.7 Out-of-school activities that assisted participants in learning and/or improving their English

Many participants mentioned that they engaged (not necessarily consciously) in certain activities that improved their English, specifically watching English television shows (or multilingual shows with English subtitles) and reading English. The examples below illustrate this.

#59 *“I used to watch a lot of soapies ... Generations. I, I used to read there whenever they write [referring to the English subtitles of the television show] ... that’s when I started ... knowing English, ja, how to speak it more, yes.”*

#75 *“Wasn’t so hard, like, I don’t even remember, like, struggling with English, ‘cause, I’m a TV person, like, I think TV influenced me ... I remember just watching cartoons, day in, day out, and then, that’s where I got most of my language ... I used to love the Discovery Channel.”*

#117 *“[Applied Communication] it does [help], because my lecturer, she always allow us to read.”*
[The lecturer sometimes asks students to read points of the theory aloud.]

7.8 Summary of the interview data collected

A number of conclusions can be drawn based on the interview data. The aim of the interview transcriptions and analysis was to identify themes from the interviews that could provide insight into the language biographies of the Limpopo students and, ultimately, the position that English has in their language repertoires.

One of the main themes from the interviews was the transition from a mother tongue as LoLT to English as LoLT. Participants commented that the transition was difficult for them but that the use of code switching in class by the teacher and/or student eased the process. It seems that some schools tended to be stricter on whether or not to allow code switching, but most participants made positive comments regarding such code switching by teachers. Some participants did express their discomfort regarding such code switching, possibly only because they might not have been proficient in the particular language to which the teacher switched. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that approximately 10% of the participants were bilingual and not multilingual, and that the language to which the teacher switched might not have been one of the two languages that they spoke.

A second finding was that at times there was a mismatch between participants’ self-rated English proficiency and their spoken English used during the interview. Some participants rated their English abilities as very good but displayed very limited knowledge of English in terms of grammar and vocabulary, whereas others claimed to have average English skills but expressed themselves well in English. The aforementioned is referred to as the Dunning-Kruger effect, which is explained by Kruger and Dunning (1999) as a tendency for people to overestimate their abilities in many social and intellectual domains because, being less skilled, they are not able to distinguish accuracy from error; improved skills and increased metacognitive competence enable people to recognise their

limitations. Regardless of their level of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, all participants could adequately express what they wanted to say during the interviews. Although Participant #10 struggled, there was still some meaningful conversation between us.

A third finding pertained to the topic of mother tongues: most participants were very proud of their mother tongues, maintaining that one's mother tongue teaches one one's culture. Even so, two participants felt that it was not necessary to teach their mother tongues to the next generation but that English should rather be the children's main language, with African languages being "add-ons". Participants who had an African language as mother tongue admitted that, although they could speak their mother tongue very well, their ability to read and write it was poor. This means that they had not developed good literacy skills in these African languages despite often having these languages as school subjects for 12 years. Reasons for this could include limited resources (in terms of learner and teacher support material) for teaching these languages or poor quality teaching of these languages.

Other findings include a positive view of learning and using English as a LoLT as well as the use of English for enjoyment. Participants also had views on which out-of-school activities can lead to improved English proficiency. In this regard, watching English television shows and reading English were mentioned.

It appears then that English has a prominent place in the language repertoire of the participants. In the next chapter, I conclude this thesis by answering the four research questions on the linguistic profiles and language biographies of the participants.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Whether it came about through British imperialism or by choice, the prominent position of English in education systems around the world cannot be denied. It is no different in South Africa, a country rich in cultures and languages but striving for transformation of many civil institutions. One of the sectors that underwent, and is still undergoing, transformation is the education sector. With issues of equal access, non-exclusion, and political agendas, the language policies of many South African universities have been revised since the dawn of democracy in the country. The restructuring of this sector (i.e., the deliberate reduction of the number of South African institutions of higher education and training by means of mergers and incorporations in 2004) also necessitated that these institutions reconsider their language policies, including the policy on their LoLT(s). In an attempt to add (albeit to a limited extent) to the body of knowledge on the role of English in tertiary institutions, this study specifically investigated the position of English in the language repertoires of multilingual students, using the VUT as a case study.

As stated in Chapter 1, the VUT is an institution of higher education that draws students from all regions of the country as well as 25 other countries. The university has four faculties and runs more than 130 programmes, making it one of the largest universities of technology in South Africa, with an annual enrolment of approximately 21 000 students. Despite the diverse language backgrounds of its students, the VUT has English as the sole official LoLT. This chapter is the conclusion to the study on the role of English in the language repertoires of VUT students. In this chapter, I answer the research questions and discuss the major findings, the latter based on the review of other authors' work and on the data obtained by investigating a sample of the VUT students in my second-year ACS classes.

8.1 Answers to the research questions

This study has investigated the language repertoires and language biographies of 127 second-year students enrolled at the VUT. This was done by having all participants fill out a questionnaire and complete a language portrait, thereafter interviewing eight of the participants who indicated on the questionnaire that they are from Limpopo. In general, the VUT was found to be a multilingual institution in terms of student demographics, despite being officially monolingual English in terms of administration and LoLT in the wide range of programmes offered on its campuses. As stated in Chapter 1, the study was conducted in a politically interesting time, one during which student politics played an important role in campus proceedings. Students' political ideologies were expressed through protests against increased student fees and marches for and against certain language policies.

At the VUT, student protests have become part of campus culture to such an extent that they influence both the academic calendar and the study environment on a regular basis. However, the language policy of the VUT has, up until the time of writing, not been the reason for any protests on its main campus, from which the sample for the study was taken.

Although the study was mainly interested in multilingual repertoires, which are currently very limitedly acknowledged in the language policy and in teaching practices at the VUT, many other findings were also made. **Research Question 1** was “What is the language profile of the 2015 and 2016 second-year Applied Communication Skills students at the VUT?” In order to answer this question, I drew up a language profile of the 127 participants, mapping the full range of their language resources regardless of whether these languages featured in their academic learning contexts. This was done for the group as a whole as well as separately for the Limpopo sample. It was found that multilingualism was the norm amongst the participants, and some individuals reported being able to communicate successfully in up to 10 languages. Ten percent of the participants were bilingual, and the remaining 90% were able to converse in three or more languages. On average, participants could use four languages effectively. Students use these languages in different contexts, but English is clearly the language of preference in social situations (outside of family contexts), and it plays an important role in education, not only because it is their LoLT but also as their preferred language for group work inside and outside of the classroom. Mother tongues are mostly used in family-related situations. Even though they use English in many domains, the participants are still of the opinion that knowing more than one language is valuable.

The **second research question** was what the language profile was of the 2015 and 2016 second-year Applied Communication Skills VUT students from the Limpopo region. From their questionnaire data and through the interviews that were conducted, it was found that the participants from Limpopo showed comparable patterns of language input before commencing with tertiary education, in terms of languages used as LoLT in their primary and secondary schools. Apart from collectively having a smaller range of languages than the larger sample – which was expected given the fact that they are all from one region – the language repertoires of the Limpopo sample were not unlike that of the larger sample: none of them were monolingual, 8% were bilingual, and the vast majority were multilingual. As was the case in the larger sample, the Limpopo students use English in all but family-related domains. Like their classmates, the students from Limpopo value the ability to speak more than one language.

Research Question 3 was “What kinds of information do the language biographies of Limpopo students give regarding their LoLTs?” These students acquired English at school. Officially, English was their

LoLT from Grade 4 onwards, but they struggled with the transition to English as LoLT, and their teachers code switched frequently, especially at primary school level. By providing detailed descriptions of their formative language experiences, the participants reported on their multilingual abilities and the relation to their current knowledge and use of English as a LoLT. Most of the interviewed Limpopo students enjoyed speaking English and found it useful to them in their everyday lives.

Research Question 4 asked how the language biographic information of Limpopo students relates to current uses of English as lingua franca as medium of instruction. I answer this question below by discussing the concept of aliteracy, which led me to the conclusion that for the Limpopo students that I interviewed, no language other than English can be used as medium of instruction at present because they are not sufficiently literate in any language but English.

8.2 Remarks on using an African language as LoLT at university level: The problem of aliteracy

The standard of education in South Africa has been a concern for many years as South Africa's science and mathematics performances were ranked as the worst in the world (News24.com 2014). This fact has been the drive for many debates and many studies, but few solutions have yet been offered. Töttemeyer (2009:3) discusses the high incidences of functional illiteracy in spite of schooling and extensive literacy training. A related but relatively new concept, that of 'aliteracy', was inspected and found relevant to this study.

Aliteracy is the phenomenon that persons who are able to read choose not to do so, resulting in a created culture involving reading only for educational purposes and not for leisure (Töttemeyer 2009:5). According to Töttemeyer (2009:5), many adults in Africa are aliterate: they have not learnt to love books, they do not read to their children, and they do not visit libraries or take their children to libraries because they believe that their children only need books once they go to school and that libraries are places for learned people only. In addition, there are usually very few books available in the indigenous languages; Töttemeyer (2009:6) states that most libraries in Africa contain only books in the colonial language.

In the current study, it was found that aliteracy exists in speakers of African languages, even amongst tertiary level students who studied their mother tongue as school subject for 12 years. When considering the development of African languages as academic languages to be used at university, such aliteracy needs to be borne in mind because it makes it difficult to implement language policies

stating that African languages will be developed and/or used as LoLTs. Because of African languages not being developed academically for use at advanced levels of study, and because many schooled speakers of African languages are aliterate in their indigenous languages, students do not have much choice in terms of LoLT: African languages do not yet serve a LoLT at South African universities, and the VUT students who took part in this study indicated that their ability to read and write in their African language L1s was not good, so academic work will not necessarily become more accessible to them were they offered the opportunity to complete such work using their L1.

8.3 English as LoLT: Study findings

Literature indicates that teaching English well is a challenging task in South Africa, especially in rural areas (Mail & Guardian 2013). As also learnt from the interviews conducted with the sample of VUT students, the teaching of English is more successful when learners are supported by their teachers through code switching, collaborative teaching, and immediate and correct feedback. Transitioning from mother tongue as LoLT to English as LoLT was experienced as a difficult process by the students but, again, the use of code switching in class by either the teacher or student or both eased the process. The study showed that whereas primary school teachers were open to code switching for learning and teaching purposes, high school teachers were often reluctant to code switch and preferred students to use English only.

The findings of this study include that English was listed as a third language in many cases, and from participants' self-rating of their English skills one can calculate that approximately 11% of the students enrolled for ACS2 are not proficient in English. Should these findings be deemed generalisable to the other VUT students, this would mean that 2310 of the 21000 enrolled students are not adequately proficient in English, despite having been taught English as a subject and through the medium of English for most of their school career, and despite studying at an institution with English as the sole official LoLT.

One of the biggest challenges with English as the LoLT is that students struggle to write in English both academically and non-academically. Although the NSC averages of the participants show that 86% of students passed English with a mark of 60% to 69%, this NSC mark does not translate into sufficient written proficiency in English to write well on first-year university level. As discussed, the VUT tries to bridge the language barrier and lack in English proficiency in a number of ways: the VUT introduced an academic writing laboratory that is part of the library services and also the two compulsory service subjects, EDL and ACS. EDL allows students to work at their own pace and in their own time towards

improved English skills, and this is viewed positively by 79% of the 879 VUT students who took part in a recent survey (Marias 2015:2). An observation made during the interviews was that students could generally speak English well. There are, however, persistent concerns about the writing abilities of students at tertiary level. Though this is a problem much bigger than what can be addressed in a few modules of communication training, those modules are still deemed worthwhile.

In South Africa, English has the position of official language alongside 10 other languages. It does, however, have the unofficial status of national lingua franca. Whilst many South African universities acknowledge multilingualism in South Africa and accept that African languages should be used or developed alongside English, English is mostly the default LoLT in the classroom. Even if most South African learners might struggle with writing in English and with many aspects of English grammar, it was found that non-English-speaking university students prefer to be taught in English.

8.4 Strengths and limitations of the study, and directions for further research

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the self-reported information obtained from the questionnaires and interviews may be inaccurate, incomplete or subjective. Secondly, the research method was inflexible in the sense that the instruments could not be modified once data collection had begun. Section 4.4 contains an example of where better instruction should have been given, perhaps verbally, for participants to indicate knowledge of language on the language profiles. A few changes could have enhanced the questionnaires to obtain clearer findings. Thirdly, because of time and resource restraints, the sample was of limited size: only 127 of the approximately 21000 enrolled students acted as participants. This somewhat limits the generalisability of the findings. Lastly, data collection took place amongst the 2015 and the 2016 cohort of ACS students. Whereas this increased participant numbers, it might have made the participant pool less homogenous.

The study also had several strongpoints. The first is that several data collection methods were used and that the data obtained via these methods supplemented and supported each other. Due to the instruments used, the study can be replicated in other contexts: the questionnaire and interview questions are available, as is the language portrait. Many discoveries were made regarding the LoLT and the impact of English on studies in higher education. That said, the questionnaire data and interviews can be investigated for further insights.

Suggestions for further study include that case studies should be done at other institutions of higher education or universities of technology on whether the trend of English as a preferred LoLT will

continue. One could also conduct case studies at other institutions to compare and evaluate the impact of different LoLTs. Given that English is the preferred LoLT at the VUT, one could investigate ways of improving the English skills (particularly the ability to write good academic prose in English) of VUT students and those at other institutions of higher learning.

8.5 Concluding remarks

It was found that being able to understand and speak English is a vital “survival skill” for the VUT students who took part in this study, and that English has a prominent place in the language repertoires of these bilinguals and multilinguals. English seems to be the preferred language to use while studying. Currently, despite its multicultural and multilingual student body, English also seems to be the only suitable LoLT for the VUT, as is the case with many other institutions of higher education. Other official languages are not yet developed enough academically to provide the effect longed for by policy makers.

Whereas the participants of this study value their mother tongues and appreciate the value of multilingualism in “the rainbow nation”, they afford English the position of unifying language, one that could assist them in overcoming language barriers. English has been shown in this case study to be invaluable for the VUT students who took part in the study, not just academically but also socially, but the reality of a poor quality of writing skills is still a concern. It is imperative that there is intervention for future students to allow them equal opportunities to be taught industry-acceptable English skills in order to improve their chances of obtaining good employment and progressing well on their chosen career paths.

References

- Alexander, N. 2004. The politics of language planning in post-apartheid South Africa. *Language Problems & Language Planning* 28(2): 113-130.
- Alsintl. 2013. *Sesotho*. Available online: <https://www.alsintl.com/resources/languages/Sesotho/> (Accessed 5 May 2016).
- Baloyi, B. & G. Isaacs. 2015. *South Africa's 'fees must fall' protests are about more than tuition costs*. Available online: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/27/africa/fees-must-fall-student-protest-south-africa-explainer/> (Accessed 6 June 2016).
- Barnes, L. 2008. A typology of family bilingualism: Towards a South African model. *Language Matters* 27(1): 122-141.
- BBC. 2014. *Welsh and 19th century education*. Available online: http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/society/language_education.shtml (Accessed 18 July 2016).
- Bembe, M.P. 2006. The use of slang among black youth in Gauteng. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 25(4): 3-72.
- Bialystok, E. 2009. Bilingualism: The good, the bad, and the indifferent. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 12(1): 3-9.
- Blommaert, J. & A. Backus. 2013. Super diverse repertoires and the individual. In I. De Saint-Georges & J.J. Weber (eds). *Multilingualism and multimodality: Current challenges for educational studies*. Sense Publishers: The Netherlands. pp. 11-32.
- Buchholz Mort, T.K. 2016. *How language drives students' transition from rural to urban areas*. Available online: <https://theconversation.com/how-language-drives-students-transition-from-rural-to-urban-areas-56220> (Accessed 14 April 2016).
- Busch, B. 2012. The linguistic repertoire revisited. *Applied Linguistics* 33(5): 503-523.
- Chetty, R. 2012. *The status of English in a multilingual South Africa: Gatekeeper or liberator?* Available online: <http://www.teachenglishtoday.org/index.php/2012/06/the-status-of-english-in-a-multilingual-south-africa/> (Accessed 10 June 2015).
- Chokwe, J.M. 2013. Factors impacting academic writing skills of English Second Language students. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 4(14): 377-383.
- City Press. 2011. *Matric mark adjustments 'were generous'*. Available online: <http://www.news24.com/Archives/City-Press/Matric-mark-adjustments-were-generous-20150429> (Accessed 5 May 2016).
- Cook, M.J. 2013. *South Africa's mother tongue education challenge*. Available online: http://www.medioclubsouthafrica.com/youth-and_education/43-culture/culturenews/3555-south-africa-s-mother-tongue-education-problem (Accessed 29 May 2015).

- Cook, V. 2009. Multilingual Universal Grammar as the norm. In Y.I. Leung (ed.) *Third language acquisition and universal grammar*. Great Britain: MPG Books. pp. 55-70.
- Corder, C.K. 2013. "Aliteracy": A threat to print media. *Worldwide Readership Research Symposium* 1999. pp. 469-476. Available online: <https://www.pdrf.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/582.pdf> (Accessed 21 November 2016).
- Council on Higher Education. 2001. *Language policy framework for South African higher education*. Available online: <http://www.dhet.gov.za/HED%20Policies/Language%20Policy%20Framework%20for%20South%20African%20Higher%20Education.pdf> (Accessed 29 May 2015).
- Council on Higher Education Quality Committee. 2007. *Audit report on Vaal University of Technology*. Available online: http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/institutional_audits/institutional_audits_2006_vaal_univ_tech_executive_summary.pdf (Accessed 15 July 2015).
- Crowley, T. 2000. *The politics of language in Ireland 1366-1922: A sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.
- Davis, R. 2013. *Analysis: Can Basic Education's new language policy work?* Available online: <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-06-12-analysis-can-basic-educations-new-language-policy-work/#.VWgsgc-eDGc> (Accessed 29 May 2015).
- Department of Arts and Culture. 2003. *National Language Policy Framework*. Available online: https://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/LPD_Language%20Policy%20Framework_English_0.pdf (Accessed 19 June 2015).
- Department of Higher Education and Training. 2002. *Language policy for higher education*. Available online: <http://www.dhet.gov.za/HED%20Policies/Language%20Policy%20for%20Higher%20Education.pdf> (Accessed 3 June 2016).
- Edwards, J. 2013. Bilingualism and multilingualism: Some central concepts. In T.K. Bhatia & W.C. Ritchie (eds). 2013. *The handbook of bilingualism and multilingualism*. London: Wiley-Blackwell. pp. 5-25.
- European Language Portfolio. 2011. *Putting a history of your own language learning*. Available online: <http://www.languageportfolio.ch/page/content/index.asp?MenuID=2672&ID=4455&Menu=17&Item=11.3.1.1> (Accessed 21 July 2015).
- Figone, K.E. 2012. *The Hegemony of English in South African Education*. Scripps Senior Theses. Paper 43. Available online: http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=scripps_theses (Accessed 21 November 2016).

- Foley, A. 2004. Language policy for higher education in South Africa: Implications and complications. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 18(1): 57-71.
- Fouche, C. 2015 (personal communication). Lang policy 2012 revised Senate for approval_15102012.doc. E-mail to M. Bam.
- Gascoigne, B. 2001. *Lingua franca*. Available online: <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=099> (Accessed 13 April 2015).
- Giliomee, H. 2015. *The battle for Afrikaans at the University of Stellenbosch*. Available online: <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/the-battle-for-afrikaans-at-the-university-of-stel> (Accessed 26 June 2016).
- Harvey, A.D. 2013. *Teaching English across the Curriculum*. Presentation made to the South African Principles Association. Available online: <http://slideplayer.com/slide/4598017/> (Accessed 27 October 2016).
- Heugh, K. 2012. *The case against bilingual and multilingual education in South Africa* (Vol. 3). Cape Town: PRAESA.
- Heugh, K., C. Benson, B. Bogale & M.A.G. Yohannes. 2007. *Final report study on medium of instruction in primary schools in Ethiopia*. Available online: http://www.everythingharar.com/publication/4379_Heugh_Studyonmediumofinstruction.pdf (Accessed 23 April 2015).
- Kang, E.Y. 2013. Multilingual competence. *Columbia University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics* 13(2): 55-56.
- Kapp, R. & B. Bangeni. 2011. A longitudinal study of students' negotiation of language, literacy and identity. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 29(2): 197-208.
- Kinsella, K. 2010. *Academic language function toolkit: A resource for developing academic language for all students in all content areas*. Available online: <http://www.htsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Academic-Language-Functions-toolkit.pdf> (Accessed 26 June 2016).
- Kruger, J. & D. Dunning. 1999. Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77(6): 1121-1134.
- Leppänen, S. & P. Pahta. 2012. Finnish culture and language endangered – Language ideological debates on English in the Finnish press from 1995 to 2007. In J. Blommaert, P. Leppänen, P. Pahta & T. Räisänen. (eds.) *Dangerous multilingualism: Northern perspectives on order, purity and normality*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan UK. pp. 142-175.
- Mail & Guardian. 2013. *Education crisis: Limpopo's school with a 0% pass rate*. Available online: <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-07-17-zero-percent-pass-rates-an-omen-of-crisis> (Accessed 14 April 2016).

- Malgas, H. 2013. 2012 National Senior Certificate results and assurance. *National Senior Certificate 2012 examinations and Annual National Assessments: Departmental and Umalusi briefings*. Available online: <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/15358/> (Accessed 21 November 2016).
- Marias, S.M. 13 July 2015. Personal communication. Student EDL survey feedback report. E-mail to M. Bam.
- Marias, S.M. 13 July 2015. Personal communication. Why the read on program? E-mail to M. Bam.
- Marjorie, L. 1982. *Language policy and oppression in South Africa*. Available online: <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/south-africa/language-policy-and-oppression-south-africa> (Accessed 23 April 2015).
- Mastin, L. 2011. *Is English a global language?* Available online: http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/issues_global.html (Accessed 7 July 2015).
- Ministry of Education. 2002. *Language policy for Higher Education*. Available online: <http://www.dhet.gov.za/HED%20Policies/Language%20Policy%20for%20Higher%20Education.pdf> (Accessed 13 April 2015).
- Navsaria, I., M. Pascoe & H. Kathard. 2011. 'It's not just the learner, it's the system!' Teachers' perspectives on written language difficulties: Implications for speech-language therapy. *South African Journal of Communication Disorders* 58(2): 95-104.
- Nel, N. and H. Müller. 2010. The impact of teachers' limited English proficiency on English second language learners in South African schools. *South African Journal of Education* 30: 635-650.
- News24. 2014. *SA has worst maths, science education in world*. Available online: <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/SA-has-worst-maths-science-education-in-world-20140602> (Accessed 18 August 2016).
- Ngcobo, Z. 2016. *VUT protests: Management, students sing different tunes*. Available online: <http://ewn.co.za/2016/05/12/VUT-management-has-continued-to-ignore-students-calls-on-security> (Accessed 6 June 2016).
- North-West University. 2014. *Institutional Language Policy of the North-West University*. Available online: http://www.nwu.ac.za/sites/www.nwu.ac.za/files/files/i-governance-management/policy/2P-2.5_Language_e.pdf (Accessed 1 June 2015).
- North-West University. 2014. *Multilingualism*. Available online: <http://www.nwu.ac.za/content/nwu-multilingualism> (Accessed 27 October 2016).
- Olivier, J. 2009. *Multilingualism in South Africa*. Available online: <http://www.salanguages.com/multilingualism.htm> (Accessed 13 April 2015).

- Onraët, L.A. 2011. English as a Lingua Franca and English in South Africa: Distinctions and Overlap. MA thesis, Stellenbosch University. Available online: <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/6545> (Accessed 26 May 2015).
- Parliamentary Monitoring Group. 2016. *Matric 2015 results in Limpopo and strategies to improve 2016 results*. Available online: <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/22066/> (Accessed 21 November 2016).
- Pasensie, K. 2015. *Bringing rural education into the fold*. Catholic Institution of Education Briefing paper No. 401. Cape Town: SACBC Parliamentary Liaison Office. Available online: <http://www.cplo.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BP-401-Bringing-Rural-Education-into-the-Fold-Dec-2015.pdf> (Accessed 21 November 2016).
- Posel, D. & J. Zeller. 2010. Home language and English language ability in South Africa: Insights from new data. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 29(2): 1-20.
- Qiong, H.X. 2004. Why China English should stand alongside British, American, and the other 'world Englishes'. *English Today* 78(20): 26-33.
- Quintal, G. 2015. 'Afrikaans must be put in its place' – Malema. Available online: <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Afrikaans-must-be-put-in-its-place-Malema-20150917> (Accessed 2 June 2016).
- Prasad, G. 2014. Portraits of plurilingualism in a French international school in Toronto: Exploring the role of visual methods to access students' representations of their linguistically diverse identities. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 17(1): 52-70.
- Raborife, M. 2016. 'Afrikaans mustn't fall, SePedi must rise' – Afriforum. Available online: <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/afrikaans-mustnt-fall-sepedi-must-rise-afriforum-20160228> (Accessed 26 June 2016).
- Rhodes University. 2006. *Language Policy*. Available Online: <http://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/institutionalplanning/documents/Language%20Policy.pdf> (Accessed 29 May 2015).
- Rose, S. 2006. The Function of Code Switching in a Multicultural and Multilingual High School. MA thesis, Stellenbosch University. Available online: <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/2084> (Accessed 28 July 2015).
- Rudwick, S. 2015. *Making an African language compulsory at university may do more harm than good*. Available online: <http://theconversation.com/making-an-african-language-compulsory-at-university-may-do-more-harm-than-good-48330> (Accessed 26 June 2016).
- SABC. 2016. Mixed reactions to new Stellenbosch language policy. Available online: <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/ffbed0804d40e430806ca8830b7eb7b6/Mixed-reactions-to-new-Stellenbosch-language-policy-20162406> (Accessed 26 June 2016).

- Seidlhofer, B. 2005. English as a lingua franca. *ELT Journal* 59(4): 339-341.
- Sello, L. 2015. Classes suspended as students protest at VUT. Available online: <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/classes-suspended-student-protest-vut> (Accessed 6 June 2016).
- Sharifian, F. 2013. Globalisation and developing metacultural competence in learning English as an International Language. *Multilingual Education* 3(7). Available online: <http://www.multilingual-education.com/content/3/1/7> (Accessed 27 May 2015).
- Sibanyoni, M. 2014. *VUT closed due to violent student protests*. Available online: <http://ewn.co.za/2014/09/10/VUT-closed-due-to-violent-student-protests> (Accessed 6 June 2016).
- Silva, P. 1997. South African English: Oppressor or Liberator? In H. Lindquist (ed.) *The major varieties of English: Papers from MAVEN 97*. Växjö, Sweden: Blackwell Publishers.
- South Africa Info. 2012. *South Africa's 'born-frees' come of age*. Available online: <http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/born-free-260412.htm#.V2fP5fl96M8> (Accessed 20 June 2016).
- South Africa Info. 2015. *Limpopo province, South Africa*. Available online: <http://www.southafrica.info/about/geography/limpopo.htm#.V7WXDPI96M8> (Accessed 11 June 2015).
- South African Government. 2015. *Education*. Available online: <http://www.gov.za/about-sa/education#higheredu> (Accessed 29 May 2015).
- South African Qualifications Authority. 2011. Statistics on post-school education and training in South Africa: 2011. [Online]. Available: <http://www.saga.org.za/docs/papers/2013/stats2011.pdf> [Accessed 2015, July 15]
- Spolsky, B. 2004. *Language policy: Key topics in sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stellenbosch University. 2015. *Language policy of Stellenbosch University*. Available online: <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Documents/Language/Language%20Policy%202014%20Final%202012%20Dec%202014.pdf> (Accessed 8 June 2015).
- Stellenbosch University. 2016. *Final language policy June 2016*. Available online: <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Documents/Language/Final%20Language%20Policy%20June%202016.pdf> (Accessed 26 June 2016).
- Taylor, S. & M. Coetzee. 2013. Estimating the impact of language of instruction in South African primary schools: A fixed effects approach. *Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers* 21(13): 1-32.
- Tötemeyer, A.-J. 2009. *Multilingualism / multiculturalism in Africa and its impact on a reading culture: The Namibian experience*. Available online: [http://www.kzneducation.gov.za/Portals/0/ELITS%20website%20Homepage/IASL%202009/totemeyer\[1\].pdf](http://www.kzneducation.gov.za/Portals/0/ELITS%20website%20Homepage/IASL%202009/totemeyer[1].pdf) (Accessed 10 June 2015).

- UNISA. 2010. *Language policy*. Available online: http://www.unisa.ac.za/research/news/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/LanguagePolicy_revapprvCouncil_19112010.pdf (Accessed 29 May 2015).
- University of Cape Town. 2003. *Language policy*. Available online: www.uct.ac.za/downloads/uct.ac.za/about/policies/languagepolicy.doc (Accessed 29 May 2015).
- University of Johannesburg. 2006. *Policy: Language*. Available online: <http://www.uj.ac.za/EN/CorporateServices/LanguageUnit/Policies/Documents/Language%20Policy.pdf> (Accessed 2 June 2015).
- University of KwaZulu-Natal. 2006. *Language policy of the University of KwaZulu-Natal*. Available online: http://humanities.ufs.ac.za/dl/userfiles/Documents/00001/755_eng.pdf (Accessed 8 June 2015).
- University of Pretoria. 2010. *Language policy*. Available online: <http://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/Legacy/sitefiles/file/1/elzanie/r1610languagepolicy.pdf> (Accessed 8 June 2015).
- University of the Free State. 2003. *Language Policy of the University of the Free State*. Available online: <http://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/language---policy-335-eng.pdf?sfvrsn=0> (Accessed 26 October 2016).
- University of the Witwatersrand. 2003. *Language Policy*. [Online]. Available: http://humanities.ufs.ac.za/dl/userfiles/Documents/00001/764_eng.pdf [Accessed 2015, May 29]
- Uys, D. 2010. *The Functions of Teachers' Code Switching in Multilingual and Multicultural High School Classrooms in the Siyanda District of the Northern Cape Province*. MA Thesis, Stellenbosch University Available Online: file:///C:/Users/208253/Downloads/uys_functions_2010.pdf (Accessed 28 July 2015).
- Vaal University of Technology. 2013. *About Vaal University of Technology*. Available online: <http://www.vut.ac.za/index.php/about-vut> (Accessed 7 July 2015).
- Vale, P. 2016. *Say it in plain (African) language*. Available online: <http://mg.co.za/article/2016-01-07-say-it-in-plain-african-language> (Accessed 1 November 2016).
- Van Rooy, B. & S. Coetzee-Van Rooy. 2015. The language issue and academic performance at a South African University. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 33(1): 31-46.
- Volmink, J. 2015. *Media statement approval decisions by Prof. John Volmink (Chair of Umalusi Council)*: 30 December 2015. Available online: <http://www.umalusi.org.za/docs/pr/2015/pr1230.pdf.pdf> (Accessed 5 May 2016).
- Vosloo, D.S. 2009. *Understanding the Role of Culture during Teaching and Learning through English Second Language at the University of Technology*. MA thesis, North-West University.

- Wei, L. 2013. Conceptual and methodological issues in bilingualism and multilingualism research. In T.K. Bhatia & W.C. Ritchie (eds). *The handbook of bilingualism and multilingualism*. London: Wiley-Blackwell. pp. 26-51.
- Wong, R.M.H. 2009. The effectiveness of using English as the sole medium of instruction in English classes: Student responses and improved English proficiency. *Porta Linguarum* (13): 119-130.

Appendix A: Consent form



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The position of English in the language repertoire of multilingual students at a tertiary institution: A case study at the Vaal University of Technology.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mariëtte Bam, BA Hons Medical, from the Arts and Social Science at Stellenbosch University in fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of MA Intercultural Communication at Stellenbosch University. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you might have similar repertoires in that you are from the same schooling background in a specific region in the country and have had similar exposure to the main languages in that region.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study is designed to assess the language knowledge and experiences regarding the learning of English and the use of English as a medium of instruction.

1. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

You will complete a language profile along with a language background questionnaire in which basic questions are asked about your language knowledge and experiences regarding the learning of English and the use of English as a medium of instruction. This part of the study will be for the duration of +/- 90 min.

The researcher will choose a group of students from Limpopo who will then be invited to participate in a follow-up discussion on this topic. This interview will be for a duration of +/- 20 min.

The researcher will finally access the student records and marks of these Limpopo students from the ITS system at VUT

2. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is no foreseen risks or discomforts relating to this study.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The subject will not benefit from participation in this study.

Language portraits will be used to gain a more detailed profile of the linguistic repertoire and biographies of the students from Limpopo province. Data will allow some measure of the kind of academic proficiency the students have developed in the use of ELF in their educational work.

4. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participation is free of charge, and you will receive no monetary payment or course credits for participating.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of (i) limited access to your data, by only the researcher and her supervisor and (ii) safe storage, on the university premises, of hard copy versions of the response record forms and other raw data. The interviews will be voice recorded to enable the researcher to transcribe the interview. Each participant who is willing to engage in a follow-up discussion with the researcher necessarily needs to disclose his/her name and contact details on the questionnaire in order for the researcher to contact them. These students will be assigned a participation number at the commencement of the research project that will serve as reference throughout the period of participation. This is to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. When the findings of this study are reported in the form of a thesis and/or journal article, any reference to you will be made in such a manner that you will not be identifiable to the readers.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

Should you have any **queries** regarding this study, please contact the researcher, Mariëtte Bam at 071 290 1314 or e-mail: marietteb@vut.ac.za or the supervisor of this project, Dr F Southwood, at +27 (0)21 8082010 (during office hours) or e-mail: fs@sun.ac.za.

8. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms. Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

| |
|--|
| SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE |
|--|

The information above was described to _____ [subject] by Mariëtte Bam in English and I am in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the subject/participant*] and/or [his/her] representative _____ [*name of the representative*]. [He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and [*no translator was used/this conversation was translated into* _____ by _____].

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix B: Language background questionnaire

Master's study of Mariëtte Bam: The position of English in the language repertoire of multilingual students at a tertiary institution: A case study at the Vaal University of Technology

BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Biographical information on the respondent:

Name and Surname:

Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male Date of birth:

Home town: In which province is your home town?

How long have you been living in your home town or in the area of your home town?

Since birth ☐ or

For years

In which town/area did you live before? (If applicable)

Which primary school did you attend? (Name of school and place/town):

.....

Which secondary/high school did you attend? (Name of school and place/town):

.....

What course are you enrolled for at the VUT?

Contact details: (optional)

You might be contacted to take part in a follow-up discussion. Please indicate whether you are willing to be contacted (even if you are not yet sure whether you would want to take part in the follow-up discussion) and whether I should do so via email or cell phone.

☐ I am willing to be contacted about taking part in a follow-up discussion.

☐ I am not willing to be contacted about taking part in a follow-up discussion.

☐ You can contact me on my cell phone. My number is

☐ You can contact me via email. My email address is

Language background of the respondent: (please complete this about yourself)

My first language is

My second language is

English is my language (example: third)

I started to learn English when I was years old

I received the following symbols for languages in matric (National Senior Certificate):

| Language | Symbol |
|-------------|--------|
| e.g. Sepedi | C |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

The environment in which I learnt English: (tick appropriate box)

- ☐ At home
 ☐ At school
 ☐ In my workplace
 ☐ In my church community
☐ In another environment (please specify):

I currently use the following language(s) –

- at home
 at family gatherings
 at university
 at social gatherings
 at work (where applicable)
 on social media (Facebook, Twitter, MXit, etc.)
 at religious gatherings (e.g., at church, mosque)

Language proficiency of respondent: (please complete this about yourself)

Please specify your ability in each language using the following numbers:

1 = very good (like a mother-tongue speaker or almost as good)

2 = good

3 = fair / OK

4 = poor / not good at all

5 = no knowledge

| Languages | Listen and comprehend/ understand | Speak | Read | Write | WHEN / WHERE you use this language (e.g., in class / at the shops) |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------|------|-------|--|
| Afrikaans | | | | | |
| English | | | | | |
| French | | | | | |
| Ndebele | | | | | |
| N. Sotho / Sepedi | | | | | |
| Sesotho | | | | | |
| siSwati | | | | | |
| Xitsonga | | | | | |
| Setswana | | | | | |
| Tshivenda | | | | | |
| isiXhosa | | | | | |
| isiZulu | | | | | |
| OTHER (please specify): | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

Patterns of language use

Please answer the following questions. If you want to, you may use the following abbreviations: Afrikaans = A; English = E; French = F; Ndebele = N; Northern Sotho / Sepedi = NS; Sesotho = SE; siSwati = SW; Xitsonga = T; Setswana = TS; Tshivenda = V; isiXhosa = X; isiZulu = Z; OTHER language/s = please write out the name/s in full.

4.1 What language/s did you as learner use in primary school for learning?

.....

4.2 What language/s did the teacher use in the classroom in primary school?

.....

4.3 What was the school's official language/s of instruction in primary school?

.....

4.4 What language/s did you as learner use in high school for learning?

.....

4.5 What language/s did the teacher use in the classroom in high school?

.....

4.6 What was the school's official language/s of instruction in high school?

.....

4.7 What language/s do you use when you work in a group in class?

.....

4.8 What language/s would you prefer to use in group work in class?

.....

4.9 What language/s do you use when you work in a group outside of the classroom (e.g., when a group of students is co-preparing for a test or assignment)?

4.10 What languages/ would you prefer to use in group work outside of the classroom?

.....

4.11 Do you find it valuable to know more than one language? Give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

4.12 Do you find it difficult to use different languages at different times at university (i.e., to switch between languages)? Give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Appendix C: Language portraits

Instructions:

- Use the coloured pens provided.
- Choose one colour per language that you know.
- Colour in the portrait in according to the languages that you know.
- At the bottom indicate language by colouring the block and writing the language next to it.

Example:  Portuguese

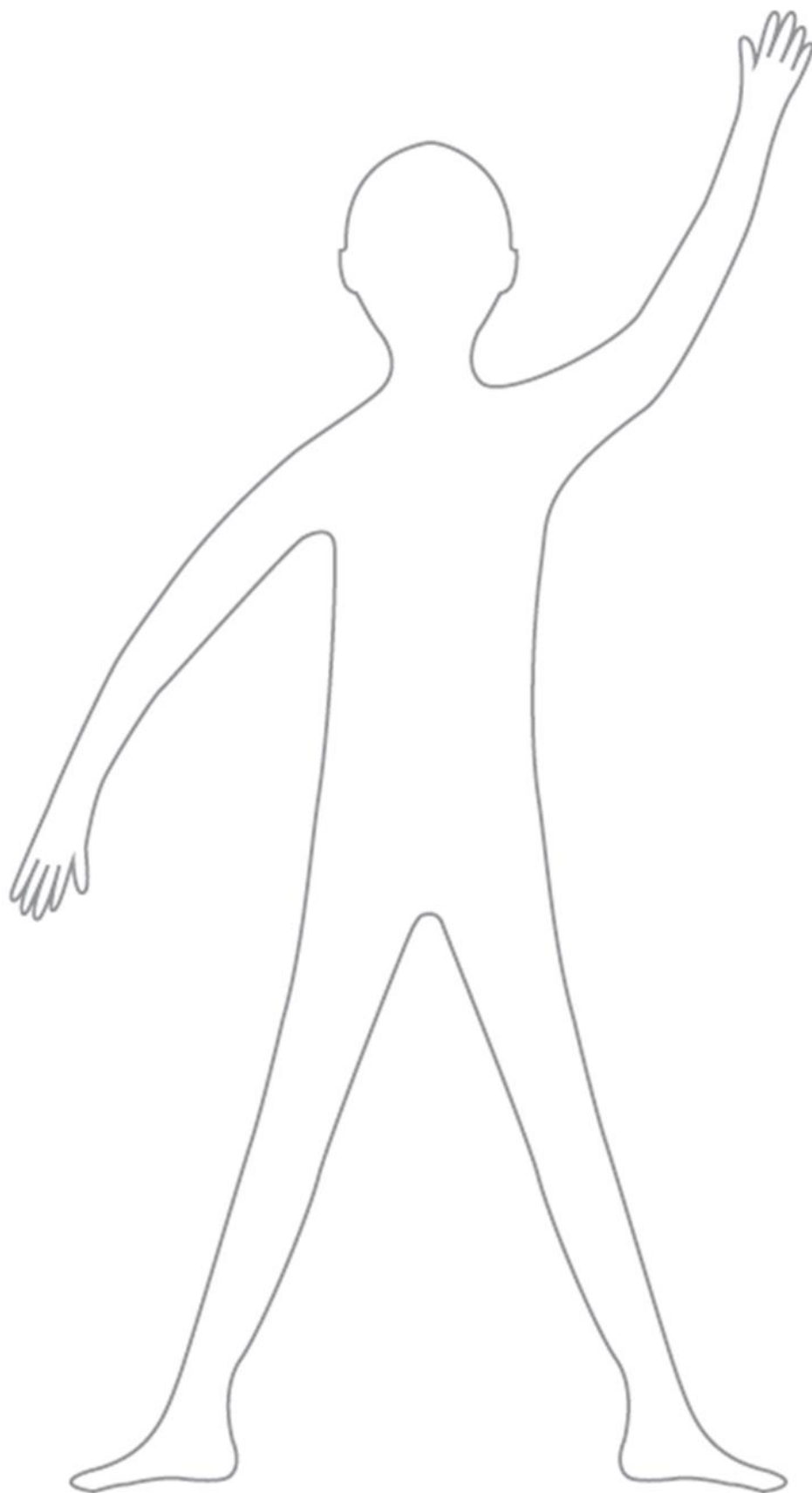
- Indicate next to the language your proficiency (your ability to use that language). Just write the number “

Mother tongue (1)

Speak well & understand well (2)

Speak a little & understand well (3)

Speak a little & understand a little (4)



Appendix D: Interview schedule

Interview questions for Limpopo students

Tell me about the education you received in Limpopo?

Notes to researcher: If no spontaneous mention thereof, ask about:

- language of education in primary school and secondary school
- school language policy (i.e., official LoLT) and actual LoLT
- teachers' use of code switching in the classroom
- teachers' attitude towards code switching in the classroom

Discuss your home language.

Notes to researcher: If no spontaneous mention thereof, ask about

- what "home language" means for the participant – WHY does s/he say X is his/her home language
- who spoke what language to the participant at what stage of his/her life
- whether what participant considers to be his/her home language has ever changed

How well do you know your home language?

Notes to researcher: If no spontaneous mention thereof, ask about reading, writing (including spelling), speaking, listening

Explain your knowledge on all the languages mentioned in your language portrait.

Tell me about your journey with English.

Notes to researcher: If no spontaneous mention thereof, ask about

- age of first exposure to English
- nature of this exposure (native speaker conversations, English classes at school, television/DVDs, non-native speaker conversations, ...)
- when did formal instruction at school start
- who gave this instruction
- was English ever the LoLT
- how good is the participant's English
- what (if anything) led to an improvement in the participant's English skills

Do you enjoy using English?

Note to researcher: If no spontaneous mention thereof, ask about situations in which participant uses English, e.g., is it more fun to read English than speak English?

How does using English influence your life?

Note to researcher: If no spontaneous mention thereof, probe for positive and negative experiences/aspects

When doing group work, do you use English only or do you also use that other languages you know?

Notes to researcher: If no spontaneous mention thereof, ask about

- what other languages are used
- what determines what other languages are used
- if English only is used, why
- do the languages used differ for in-class and out-of-class group work

Please write an essay (of approximately 300 words) on “My life as a student”

Remember that spelling and grammar will be marked.